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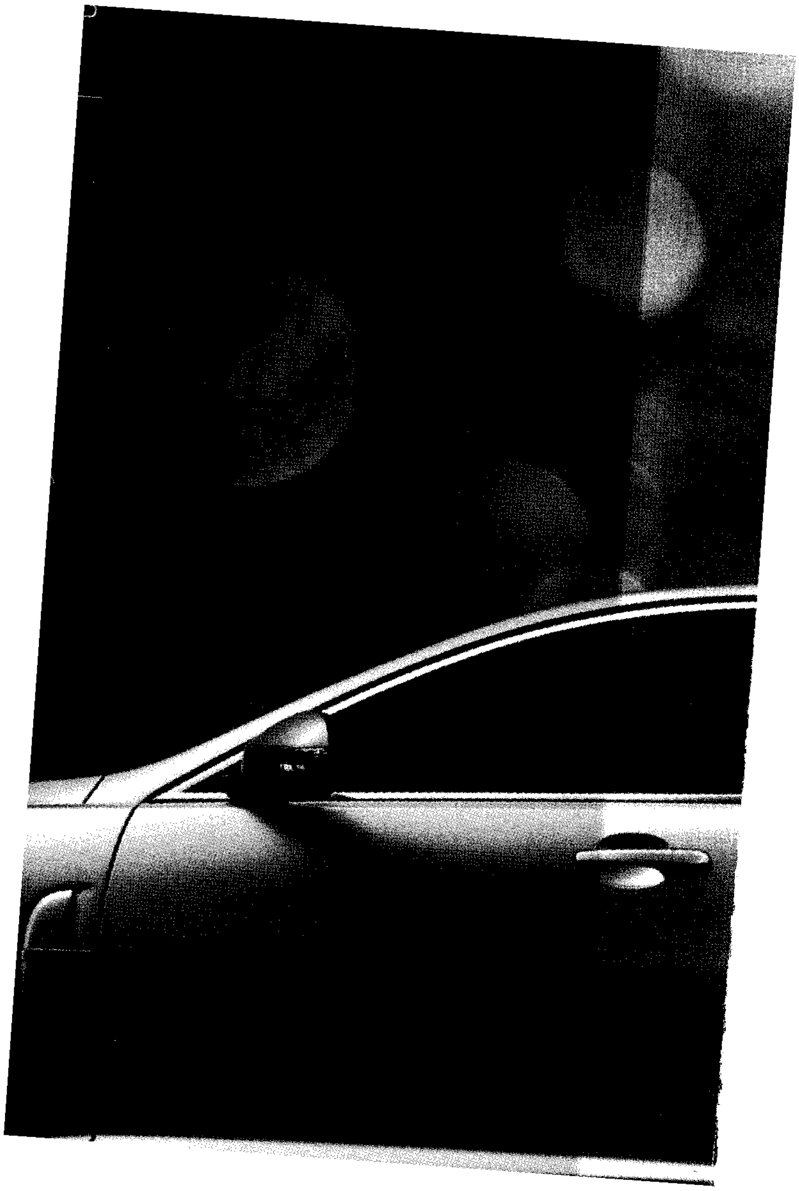

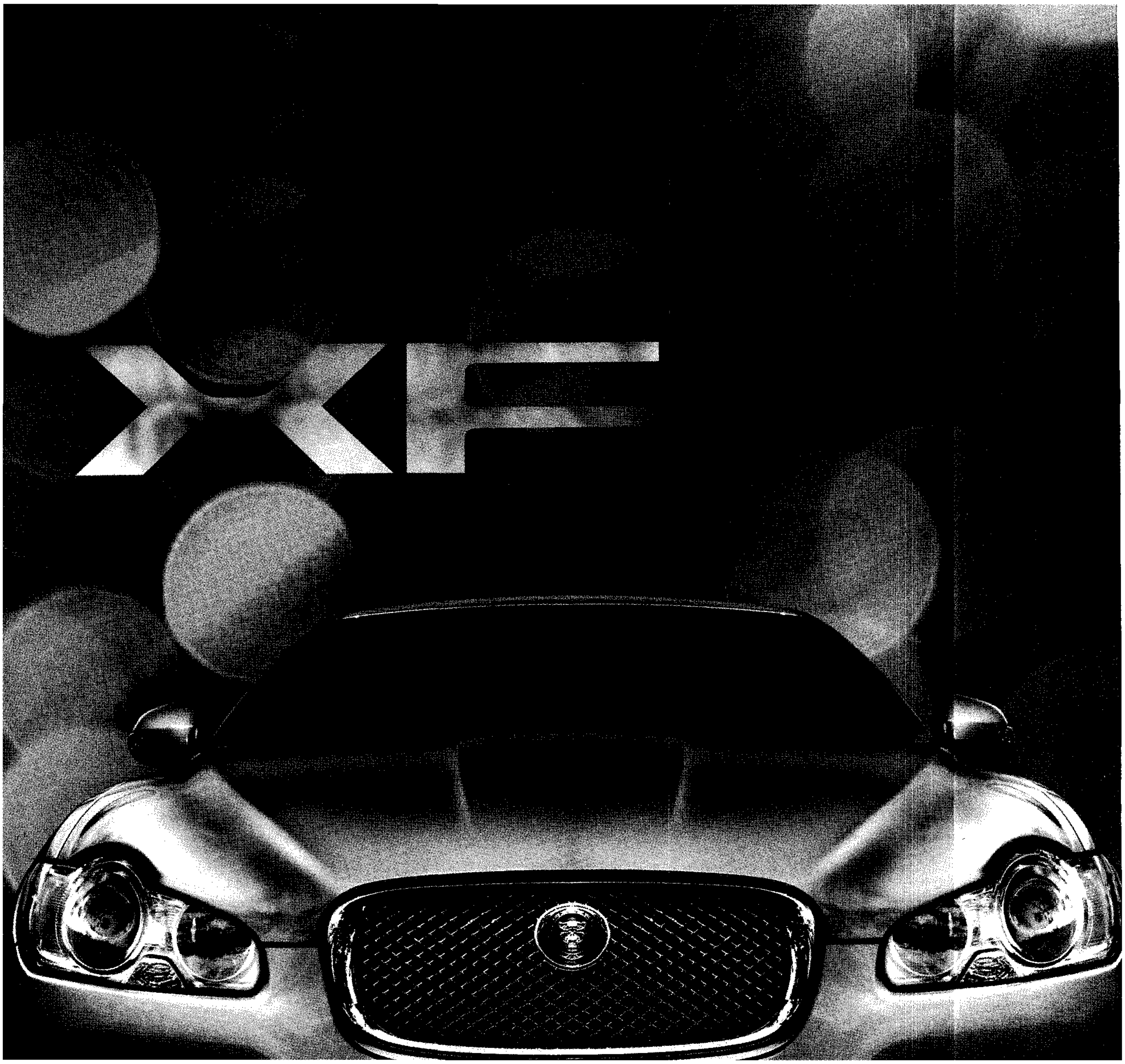
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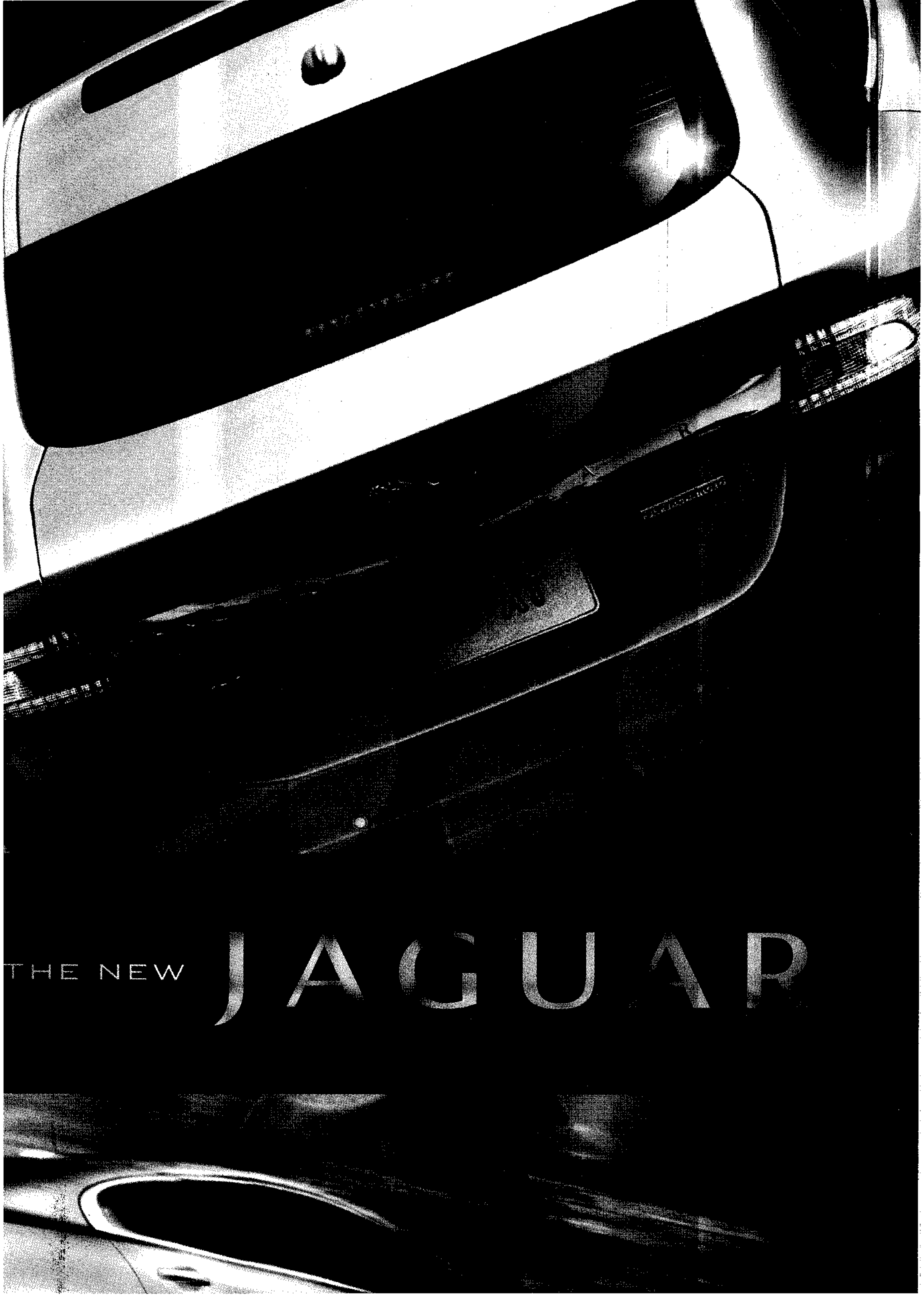
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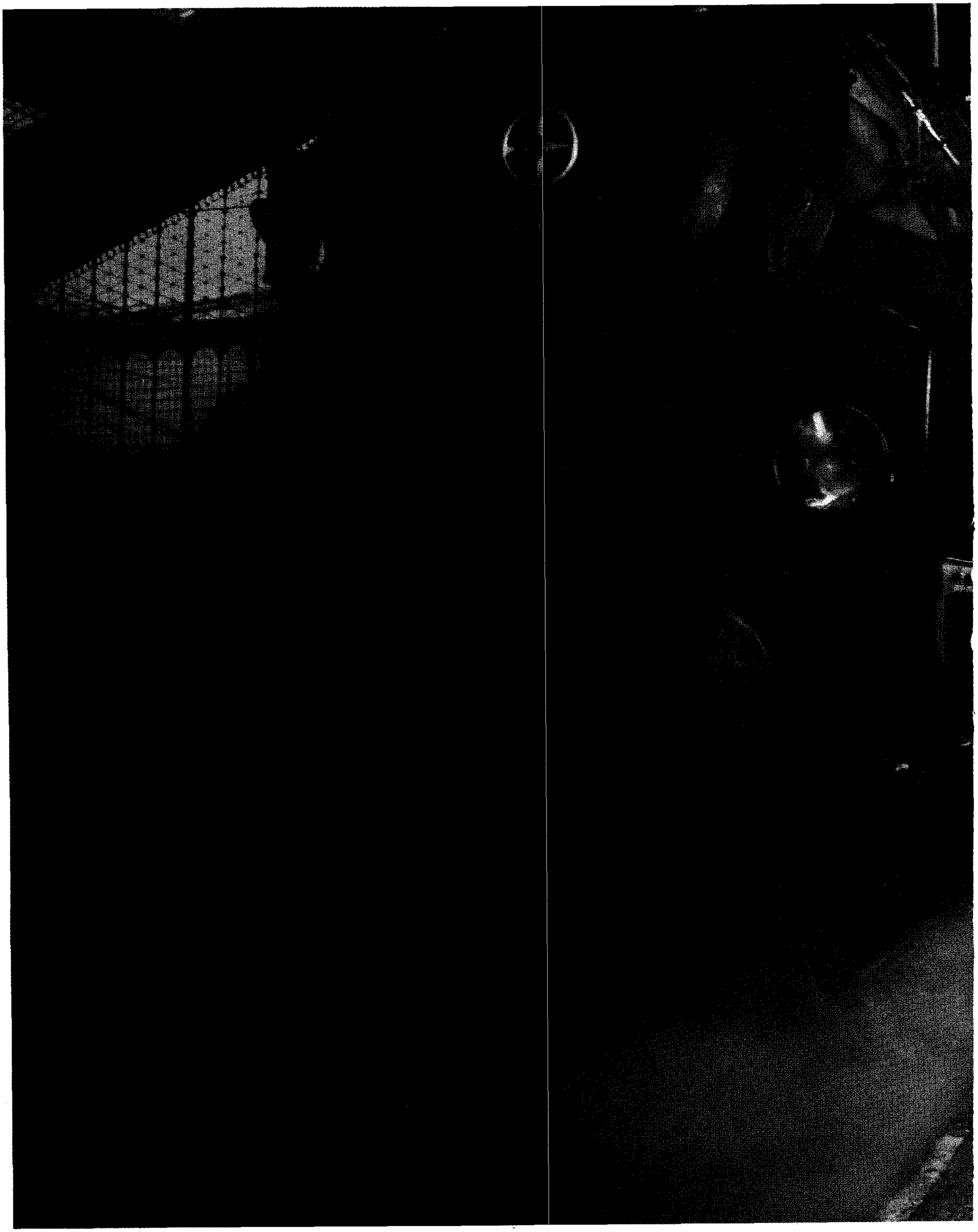

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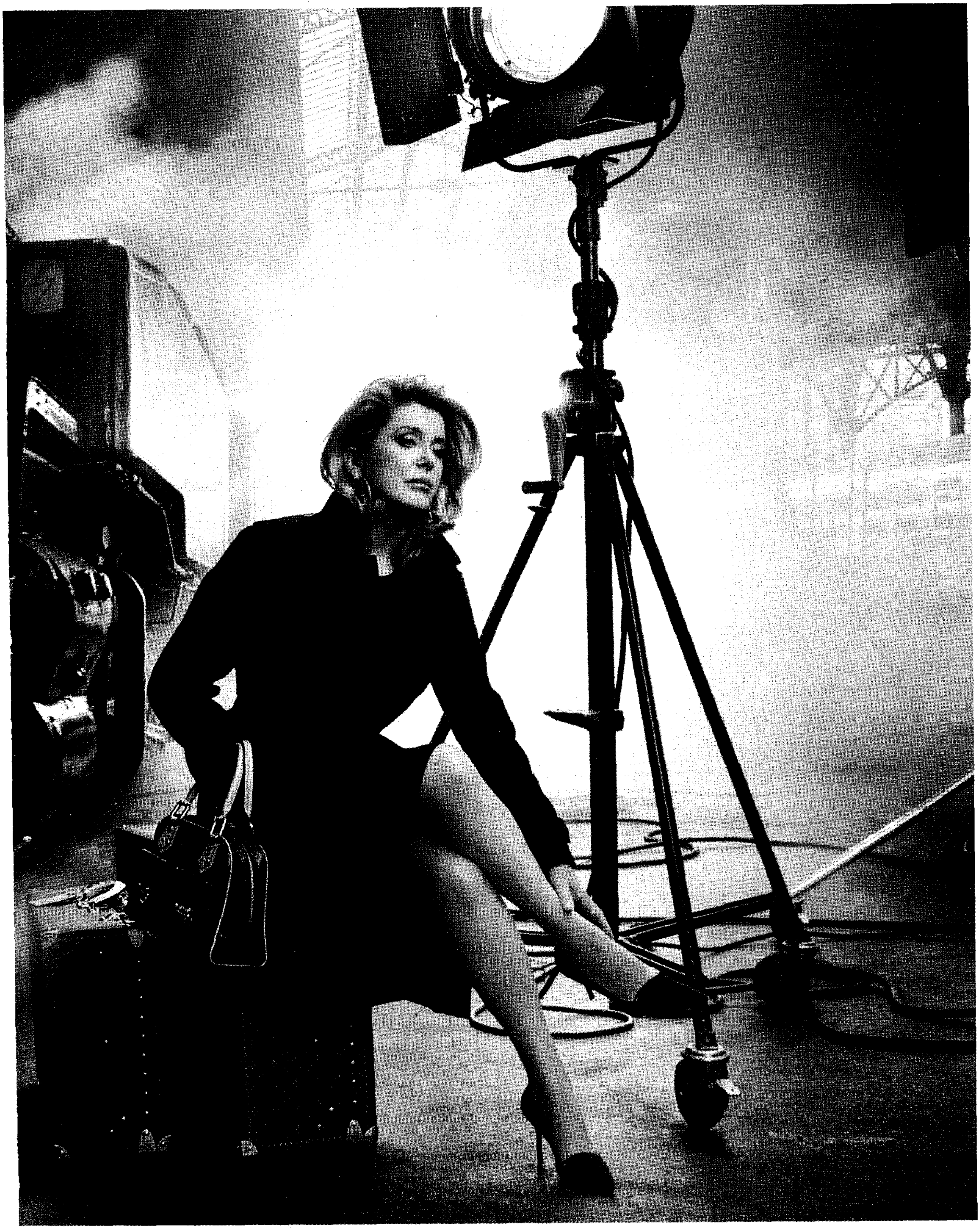

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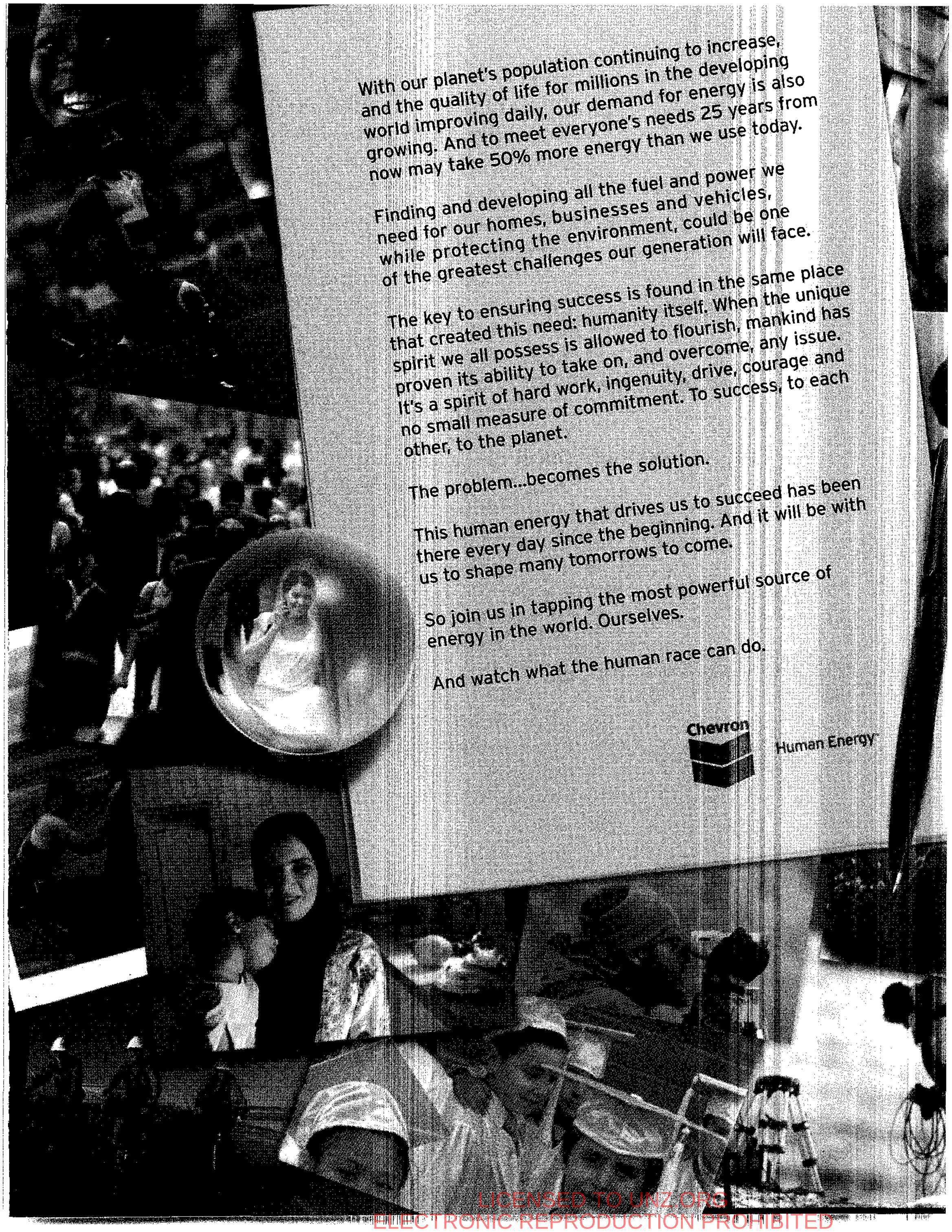

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Human Energy

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THE ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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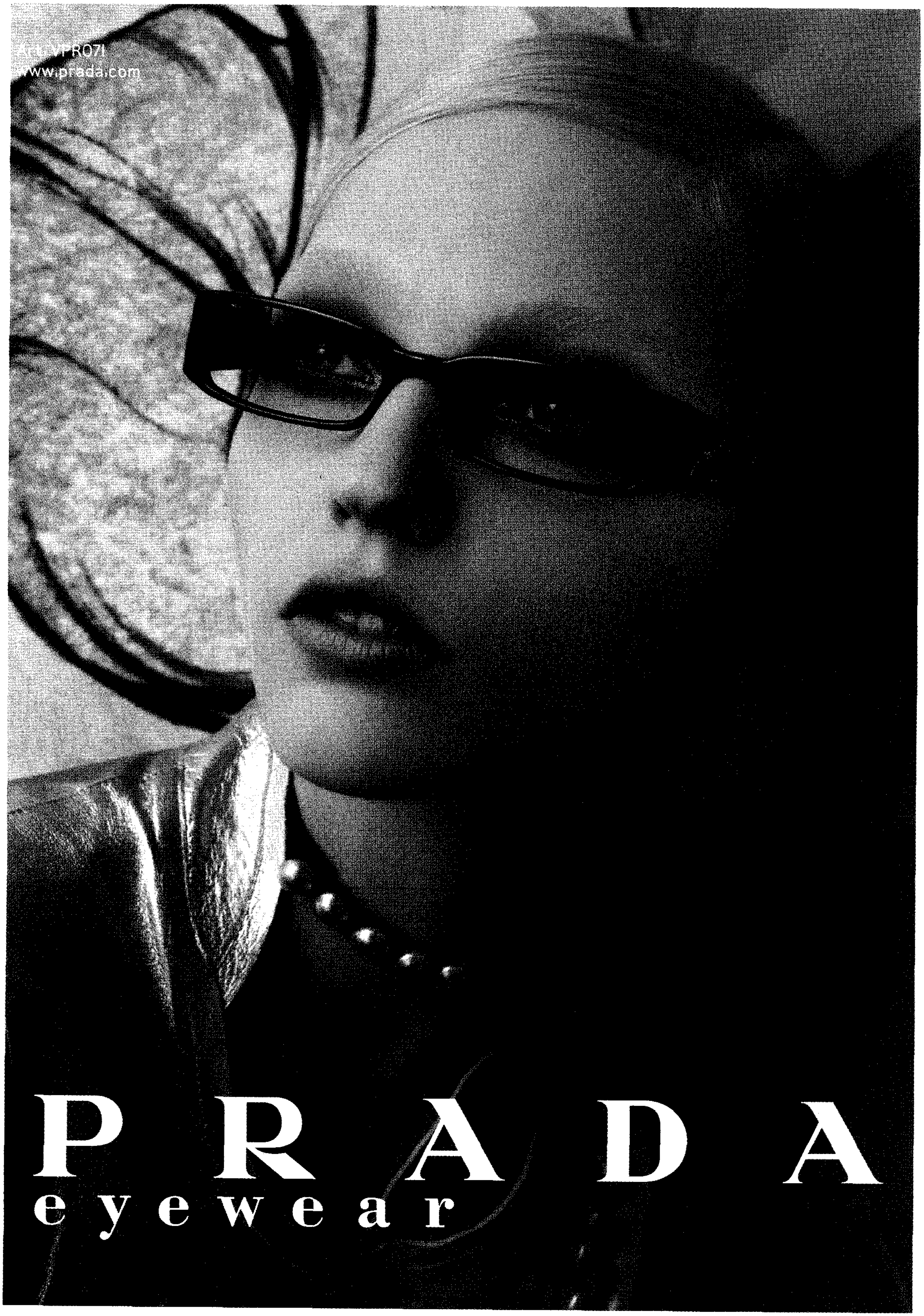
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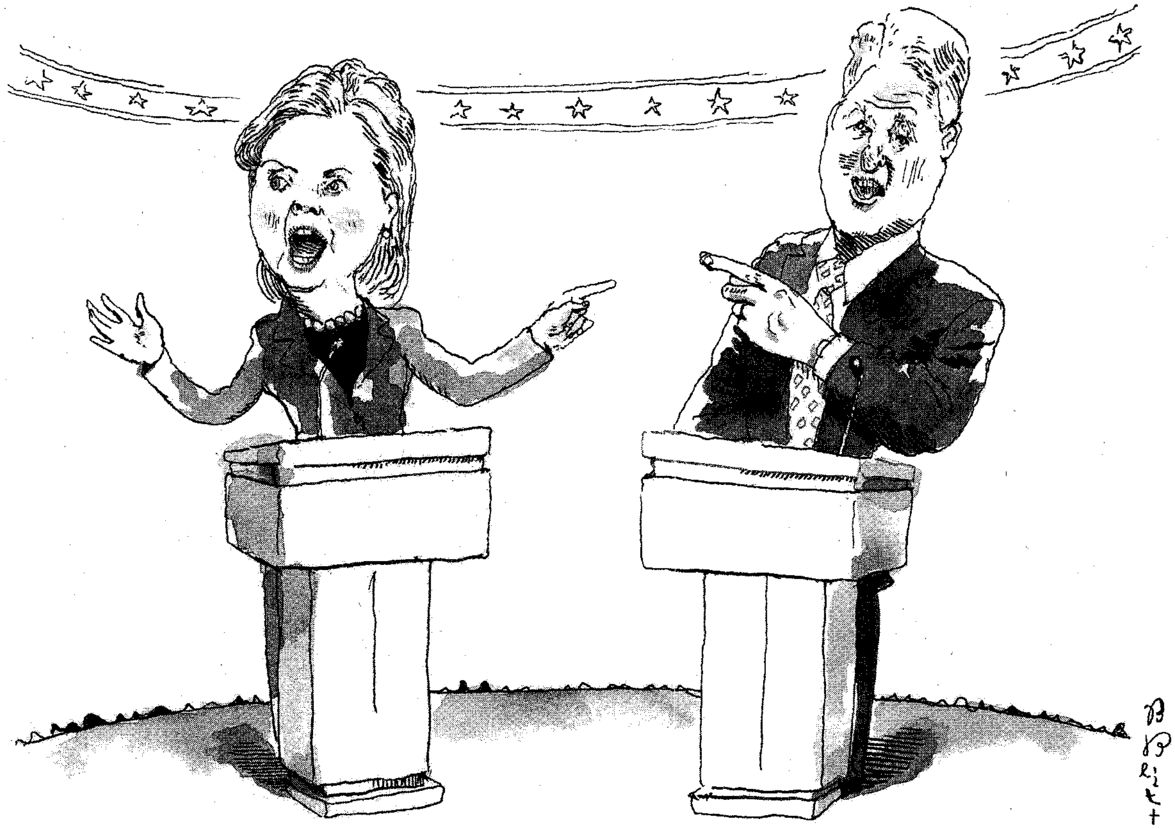
SPOTS *Benoît van Innis*



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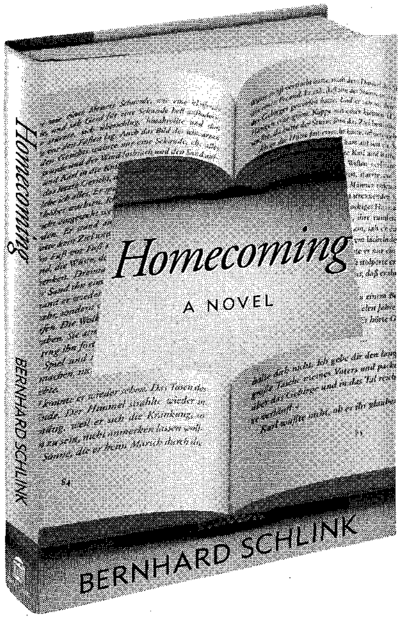

"His most powerful novel."
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—*The New York Times Book Review*

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—*Los Angeles Times*

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—*The Washington Post Book World*

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CONTRIBUTORS

Seymour M. Hersh ("A Strike in the Dark," p. 58) has been contributing to the magazine since 1971. He is the author of eight books, including "Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib."

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 49), a senior editor, writes about politics and policy. He also writes a blog on newyorker.com.

Rebecca Mead ("Eerily Composed," p. 74) published her first book, "One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding," in May.

David Owen ("Call Me Loyd," p. 84) is the author of "Sheetrock & Shellac: A Thinking Person's Guide to the Art and Science of Home Improvement," which is out in paperback.

Paul Slansky (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 90) has written five books, including "Idiots, Hypocrites, Demagogues, and More Idiots," which came out in December.

Susan Orlean ("Thinking in the Rain," p. 92) is working on a book about Rin Tin Tin. She is a contributor to "Thirty Ways of Looking at Hillary," a collection of essays by women writers, which has just been published.

James B. Stewart ("The Birthday Party," p. 100) is the Bloomberg Professor at the Columbia School of Journalism. His piece "The Kona Files," about Hewlett-Packard, was published in our issue of February 19 & 26, 2007.

Kathleen Graber (Poem, p. 108) is a Hodder Fellow at Princeton University. Her first collection of poems is "Correspondence."

Robert Polidori (Portfolio, p. 114) will have an exhibition of his photographs at the Edwynn Houk gallery, in New York, in April. His book of photographs of Versailles will be published in the fall.

David Grann ("True Crime," p. 120) is a staff writer.

Alice Munro (Fiction, p. 136) has published twelve short-story collections, including "Runaway" and "The View from Castle Rock."

John Updike (Books, p. 148) contributes regularly to the magazine. "Due Considerations" is his sixth collection of essays and literary criticism.

Seth (Cover), a comic-book artist, is the author of four graphic novels, including "Wimbledon Green."

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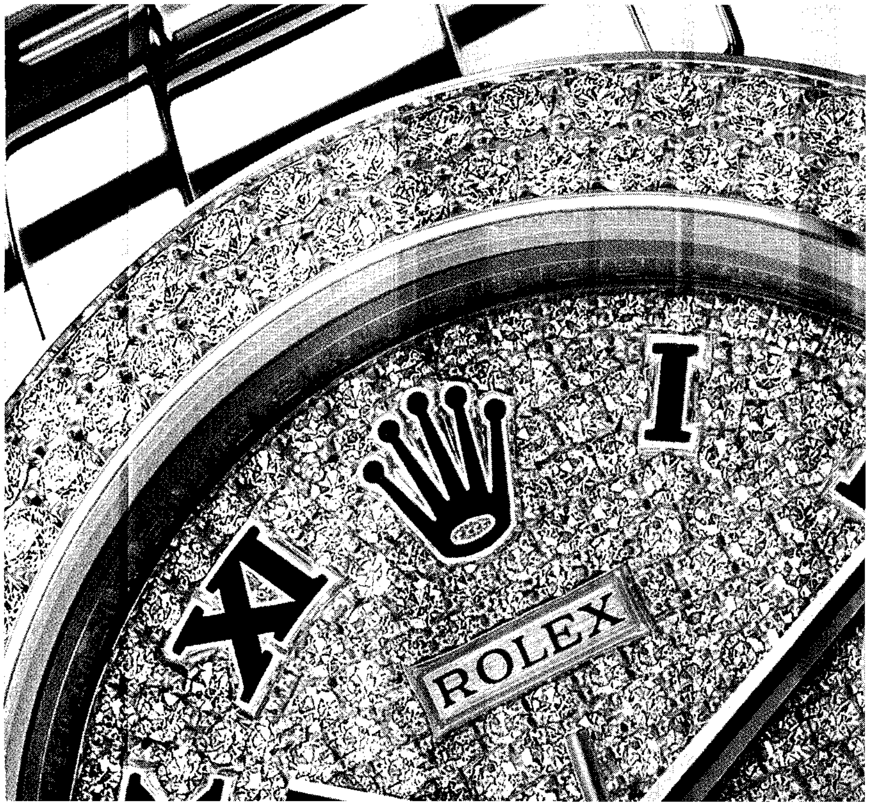
The Naked Campaign videos, featuring Steve Brodner. / *Hendrik Hertzberg* blogs the Presidential race, and chats with *Ryan Lizza* and *Dorothy Wickenden* on the Campaign Trail podcast. / The winning entries in the Eustace Tilley contest, plus an interview with *Françoise Mouly*, the art editor. / *George Packer* talks about his new play, "Betrayed," with a video excerpt. / Goings On, a new culture blog. / The music of Nico Muhly. / Art from the Met's new galleries. / From the archives: *Sister Souljah* on Mary J. Blige, *Fintan O'Toole* on Martin McDonagh. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.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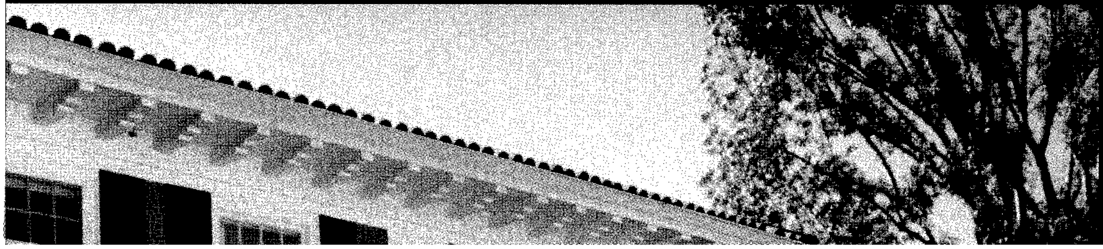
LET THE GOOD TIMES RO



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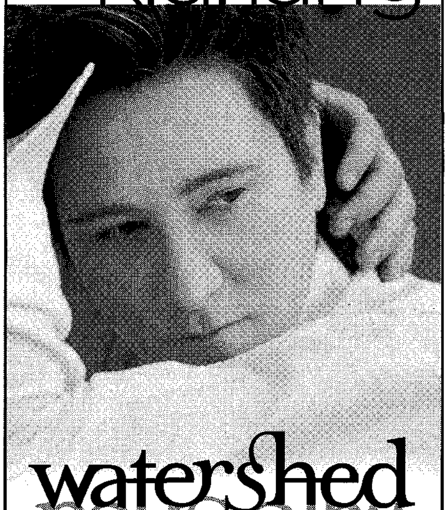

k.d. lang

watershed

"If you have any interest in seriously beautiful songs," writes *The Times* of London, "[this is] a masterpiece that holds its place next to, maybe even slightly above, her 1992 hit *Ingenue*."

For "Watershed," k.d. lang has, for the first time, taken on the role of producer - as well as writer, singer and multi-instrumentalist - for this album of new original songs. The result is perhaps lang's most confident and revealing work, with gorgeous arrangements featuring strings and guitars, and lyrics that evoke intimate reverie and reflection.

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THE PRIMARY BATTLE

George Packer, in writing on the candidacies of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, spends a great deal of time on the latter and very little on the former ("The Choice," January 28th). That Packer, in describing Clinton's career (and errors), has so much on which to draw is illustrative. I am uplifted by Obama's rhetoric, but it is Clinton's experience, especially in foreign policy and in effecting actual change, that has persuaded me to support her candidacy. Elsewhere, Packer writes that "within minutes" of hearing Obama speak he "couldn't recall a single thing that [Obama] had said, and the speech dissolved into pure feeling." If this is supposed to be a testament to political acumen, it doesn't sway me. Words are just words until action is behind them.
Sands Hall
Nevada City, Calif.

Packer's article demonstrates that there is no real basis of comparison between the two candidates. May I suggest that the reason for the essay's lack of substance regarding Barack Obama's ideas is that his campaign feels more like a pleasant horoscope than like a run for the Presidency? (The kind that anyone can read and think, Yes! I want change, too! It's amazing how well he knows me.) Is there anything wrong with a candidate who has had her eye on the Presidency for more than a few years, and who values her private life? I'll choose an ambitious woman of substance over a fortune cookie any day.
Ursula Oberg
Aptos, Calif.

Packer notes Clinton's invocation of Lyndon Johnson in an effort to emphasize her political experience over Obama's. But the Johnson comparison actually emphasizes her flaws. President Johnson's support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 set a standard for courage, political skill, and integrity (in a man of questionable integrity). Clinton, on the other hand, has hedged and pandered on the primary moral questions that confront America today: the war in Iraq and a just peace between Israel and the Palestinians. And her current strategy to divide Democrats along racial and gender lines is not what one would call "political skill." Senator Clinton, you are no Lyndon Johnson.
H. Reed Cosper
Providence, R.I.

TRIAL WITHOUT ERROR

Carl Elliott raises genuine issues about what happens to the integrity of medical research when a small number of participants make a "career" of enrolling in clinical trials ("Guinea Pigging," January 7th). Clinical-research organizations make every effort to protect the welfare of research participants and to insure the integrity of clinical-trial data. Though Elliott accurately states that financial incentives may in part motivate research sponsors and researchers to adhere to regulations and safety standards, he worries that for-profit companies might cut corners. In fact, a study by the Tufts Center for the Study of Drug Development suggests that research projects in which study sponsors had a high level of clinical-research-organization involvement completed trials faster, without any diminishment of patient safety or data quality. From tuberculosis to H.I.V./AIDS, carefully conducted clinical trials are the best method to develop effective new medicines. Clinical-study participants are the unsung heroes who help to bring such critical treatments to the patients who need them the most. We hope that the atypical experiences of a small group of self-proclaimed "guinea pigs" will not dissuade people from taking part in the essential clinical trials that underlie medical progress today.
Douglas Peddicord
Executive Director, Association of Clinical Research Organizations
Washington, D.C.

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Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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A.M. HOMES, *VANITY FAIR*

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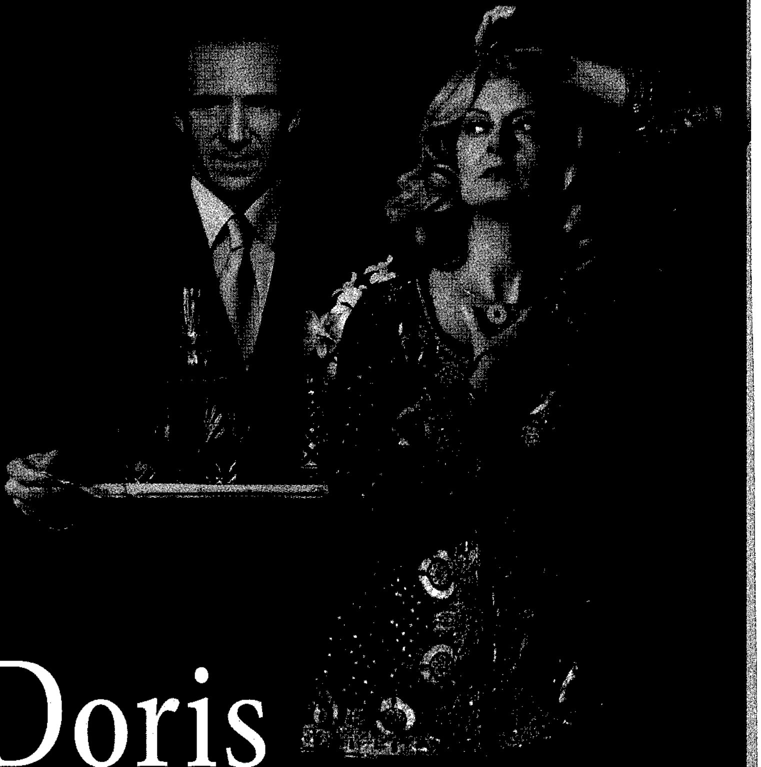
HERE'S PLENTY OF THAT, TOO, IN THIS EXOTIC STORY
IRECTED TO PERFECTION BY MR. BALABAN."
LIZ SMITH, *NEW YORK POST*

WATCHED IT TWICE. IT'S THAT JUICY."
LINDA STASI, *NEW YORK POST*



very heiress needs a butler.
very butler needs a Duke.

Bernard *and* Doris

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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10	11	12	13	14	15	16
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
DEAD RINGER

Mary-Louise Parker, Kathleen Chalfant, and Bill Camp star in Sarah Ruhl's dark comedy "Dead Man's Cell Phone," at Playwrights Horizons. In the play, having its New York première, a woman answers the cellular phone of a man who's just died in a café and becomes involved with his family. (See page 18.)

NIGHT LIFE
DON'T GO GENTLY

Siouxsie Sioux, the former first lady of British punk and the reluctant queen of all things goth, has matured into a seasoned recording artist. Her début solo album, "Mantaray," is sharp and inviting, and she's touring the U.S. for the first time on her own. She starts her visit with two nights at the Fillmore New York at Irving Plaza. (See page 24.)

ART
NATURAL SELECTION

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), the founder of French classical painting, is better known for epic narrative canvases such as "The Abduction of the Sabine Women" than for landscapes. The first exhibition to delve solely into his fascination with the great outdoors is "Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions," at the Met. (See page 26.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
WINTER JOURNEY

Alfred Brendel, Europe's philosopher-king of the keyboard, is winding down his long career. For his last concerto appearance in New York, he goes back to basics, performing Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor with James Levine and the Met Orchestra at Carnegie Hall. (See page 34.)

MOVIES
THE HUMAN STRAIN

It took only thirty years for Charles Burnett's wondrous first feature, "Killer of Sheep," to get a proper release and win fitting recognition. Anthology Film Archives offers his rarely screened work, including "To Sleep with Anger," with Danny Glover, and Billy Woodberry's "Bless Their Little Hearts," which Burnett wrote and photographed. (See page 40.)

Nicole Atkins and the Sea, performing at Bowery Ballroom. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

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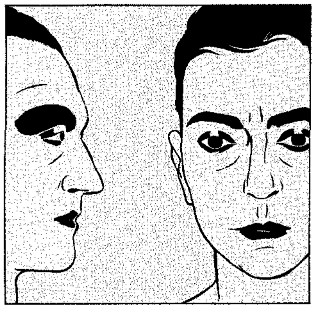
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BI-CENTENNIAL



GRANT SHAFFER

Antony Tudor and José Limón were about as different as two New York-based choreographers could be. The Mexican-born Limón, a modern-dance choreographer, was interested in the soul's exaltations. The English-born Tudor, a ballet choreographer, dealt in the soul's disappointments. But both men were born a hundred years ago, and on Feb. 8-9 New York Theatre Ballet, a small troupe that puts on excellent old pieces neglected by other companies, is celebrating their joint centenary. Of Limón we will get "Mazurkas," a tribute to the heroic spirit of the Polish people. Tudor will be represented by three pieces, including "Jardin aux Lilas," one of his least acidulous ballets—also his greatest—and "The Judgment of Paris," perhaps his nastiest, with three exhausted whores competing for the patronage of a drunk in a bar. (These were staged by the Tudor expert Sallie Wilson.) N.Y.T.B.'s young dancers are not masters of the English manners so important to "Jardin aux Lilas." But they do it with spirit, and I would travel a long way to see this sad, beautiful ballet again.

—Joan Acocella

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ADDING MACHINE
A musical based on an expressionist play by Elmer Rice from 1923, about an exemplary employee who is replaced by a mechanical device. With a score by Joshua Schmidt and a libretto by Schmidt and Jason Loewith. David Cromer directs. Previews begin Feb. 7. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

APPLAUSE
The "Encores!" season begins with this 1970 musical based on the film "All About Eve," starring Christine Ebersole, Kate Burton, and Mario Cantone. Kathleen Marshall directs and choreographs. Feb. 7-10. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

ARTFUCKERS
Michael Domitrovich's sendup of the élitism of the downtown art scene, directed by Eduardo Machado. Previews begin Feb. 8. Opens Feb. 19. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

BEEBO BRINKER CHRONICLES
A drama about a lesbian love triangle in pre-Stonewall Greenwich Village, adapted by Kate Moira Ryan and Linda S. Chapman, from Ann Bannon's pulp novels of the fifties and sixties. Leigh Silverman ("Well") directs. Previews begin Feb. 19. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100.)

BETRAYED
Culture Project presents a play by George Packer, a writer for this magazine, about Iraqis who risked their lives helping Americans in the Iraq war. Pippin Parker directs. Opens Feb. 6. (55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

BRIAN DYKSTRA THE JESUS FACTOR
Margarett Perry directs Dykstra in his one-man show, a monologue on the current political climate. In previews. Opens Feb. 7. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
Debbie Allen directs the Tennessee Williams play, about a dysfunctional Mississippi family. Terrence Howard, Anika Noni Rose, James Earl Jones, Phylicia Rashad, and Giancarlo Esposito star. Previews begin Feb. 12. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CENCI
Hotel Savant and John Jahnke stage a translation of Antonin Artaud's play, about a family scandal in Rome in 1599. In previews. Opens Feb. 7. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-352-3101.)

CLAYMONT
Kevin Brofsky wrote this drama about a family in small-town Delaware in the nineteen-sixties. Derek Jamison directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 9. (Rose Nagelberg, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-352-3101.)

CONVERSATIONS IN TUSCULUM
The Public presents the world première of a play written and directed by Richard Nelson, about Julius Caesar. Aidan Quinn, Brian Dennehy, David Strathairn, Gloria Reuben, Joe Grifasi, and Maria Tucci star. Previews begin Feb. 19. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

CRIMES OF THE HEART
Kathleen Turner directs the Roundabout Theatre Company's production of the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Beth Henley, from 1979, about the reunion of three sisters in Mississippi. In previews. Opens Feb. 14. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE CRUCIBLE
Pamela Moller Kareman directs Arthur Miller's drama from 1953, based on the Salem witch trials of 1692. In previews. Opens Feb. 9. (ArcLight, 152 W. 71st St. 212-352-3101.)

DEAD MAN'S CELL PHONE
The New York première of Sarah Ruhl's new play, about a woman who answers the cell phone of a dead man and becomes involved with his family. Starring Mary-Louise Parker, Kathleen Chalfant, and Bill Camp. Anne Bogart directs. Previews begin Feb. 8. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

FABULOUS DIVAS OF BROADWAY
The actor Alan Palmer impersonates performers such as Ethel Merman, Liza Minnelli, Julie Andrews, Patti LuPone, and Kristin Chenoweth, in this autobiographical musical. Previews begin Feb. 13. (St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

GRACE
Lynn Redgrave stars in a drama by Mick Gordon and A C Grayling, about an atheist scientist whose son wants to become a Christian minister. In previews. Opens Feb. 11. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

IN CIRCLES
Kaliyuga Arts presents a musical by Al Carmines from 1968, based on Gertrude Stein's "A Circular Play." Opens Feb. 12. (Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Square Park S. 212-868-4444.)

IN THE HEIGHTS
The Off Broadway musical, which depicts a microcosm of the Latino community of Washington Heights, moves to Broadway. With music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda and a book by Quiara Alegria Hudes. Thomas Kail directs. Previews begin Feb. 14. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE JAZZ AGE
A play by Allan Knee ("The Man Who Was Peter Pan"), about Ernest Hemingway, Zelda Sayre, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Directed by Christopher McElroen. Previews begin Feb. 8. Opens Feb. 14. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

KILLING THE BOSS
A new dark comedy by Catherine Filloux ("Lemkin's House"), about a mild playwright turned assassin. Jean Randich directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 12. (Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

LIBERTY CITY
Jessica Blank and April Yvette Thompson wrote this play, performed by Thompson and directed by Blank, about Thompson, the daughter of a Bahamian-Cuban father and an African-American mother, and the trials her family endured over three decades in Miami. Previews begin Feb. 15. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

LIFE IN A MARITAL INSTITUTION
James Braly wrote and performs this monologue about marriage and counselling. Hal Brooks directs. Previews begin Feb. 19. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

LOWER NINTH
At the Flea, Daniel Goldstein directs Beau Willimon's drama, about two men stuck on a roof after a hurricane. Previews begin Feb. 14. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

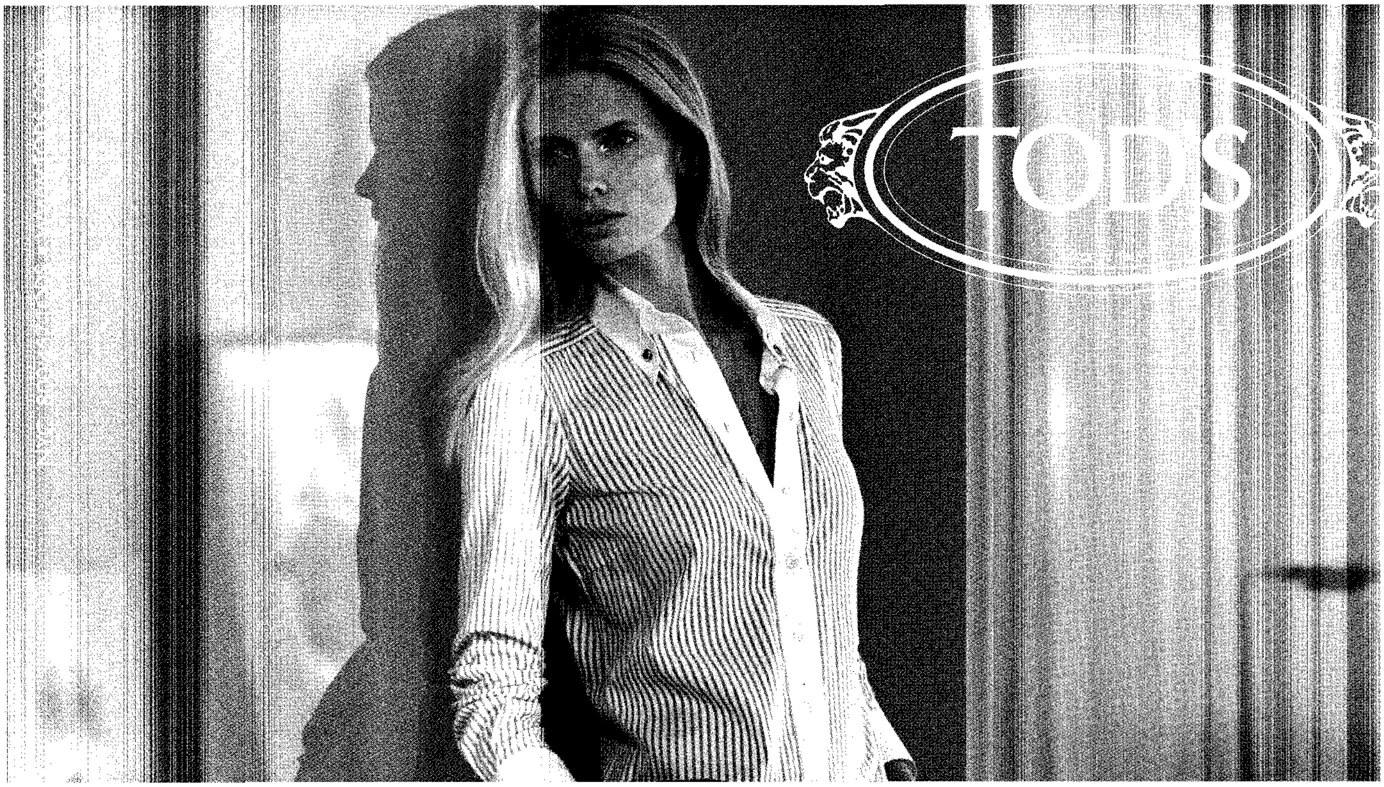
MACBETH
Patrick Stewart reprises his Chichester Festival Theatre performance as the power-hungry general. Rupert Goold directs. Preview on Feb. 12. Opens Feb. 13. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

MOM, HOW DID YOU MEET THE BEATLES?
The Public kicks off its Public Lab program with a drama by Adam P. Kennedy and Adrienne Kennedy, about Adrienne's brushes with fame in London in the nineteen-sixties. Peter DuBois directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 10. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

NEXT TO NORMAL
Michael Greif directs a new musical by Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, about a modern suburban family. Alice Ripley and Brian d'Arcy James star. In previews. Opens Feb. 13. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

OROONOKO
Biyi Bandele adapted Aphra Behn's 1688 novella, about slaves brought to Surinam. Kate Whoriskey directs the Theatre for a New Audience production. In previews. Opens Feb. 10. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

PARADISE PARK
Signature Theatre Company presents the world première of a play by Charles Mee, about a fictional amusement park. Previews begin Feb. 12. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)


TOD'S

PARLOUR SONG
Emily Mortimer, Chris Bauer, and Jonathan Cake star in the world première of Jez Butterworth's drama, about a man who becomes paranoid that his wife is stealing from him. Neil Pepe directs the Atlantic Theatre Company production. Previews begin Feb. 15. (336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

PASSING STRANGE
The rock musical by Stew and Heidi Rodewald, about a young middle-class black man who finds himself in bohemian Europe, gets transferred to Broadway. The original cast, including Daniel Breaker, remains intact. Annie Dorsen directs; choreography by Karole Armitage. Previews begin Feb. 8. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

RUM AND COKE
Carmen Peláez wrote and stars in this one-woman show, about a Cuban in Miami who travels to Havana. Carl Andress directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 13. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

SAND
Trista Baldwin wrote this drama, about three American soldiers in the Middle East. Daniella Topol directs the Women's Project production. In previews. Opens Feb. 10. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

SECRETS OF A SOCCER MOM
Judith Ivey directs Kathleen Clark's new drama, about three women who compete in a soccer match with their sons. Previews begin Feb. 9. (Snapple Theatre Center, 50th St. at Broadway. 212-307-4100.)

THE SLUG BEARERS OF KAYROL ISLAND (OR, THE FRIENDS OF DR. RUSHOWER)
The Vineyard presents a musical, with libretto and drawings by Ben Katchor and music by Mark Mulcahy, about exploited workers on a tropical island. Bob McGrath directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 12. (108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE
Roundabout Theatre Company mounts the Stephen Sondheim–James Lapine musical from 1984, inspired by Georges Seurat's most famous painting. Daniel Evans and Jenna Russell star. Sam Buntrock directs. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

TWO THOUSAND YEARS
The New Group presents the U.S. première of a play by Mike Leigh, about a liberal Jewish family in suburban London whose son suddenly becomes devout. Scott Elliott directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 7. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

UNCONDITIONAL
LAByrinth Theatre Company presents a new play by Brett C. Leonard, in which nine New York stories converge. Mark Wing-Davey directs. Previews begin Feb. 7. Opens Feb. 18. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

VITA & VIRGINIA
Kathleen Chalfant and Patricia Elliott star in Eileen Atkins's adaptation of the letters between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West. Opens Feb. 11. Mondays only. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

ALMOST AN EVENING
The authors of such unique explorations of middle-American consciousness as "Miller's Crossing" and "Fargo," Joel and Ethan Coen have produced films that are often marred by a flip attitude. Sad to say, Ethan hasn't grown up much here. His three plays have a common theme: strangers in paradise—or Hell. The most successful deals with a young man (the exceptional British actor Jonathan Cake) who looks for answers in a men's sauna. In the last piece, F. Murray Abraham, dressed in a long wig and robes, plays a God who doesn't much get along with anyone. In spite of the short, seventy-five-minute length, it doesn't take long to feel like you're wasting your time listening to Coen's collegiate prattle about the nature of the universe, and the privilege inherent in his tired jokes, which, apparently, are at the center of it. (Atlantic Theatre Company, Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200. Through Feb. 10.)

THE BLUE FLOWER
Will Pomerantz directs Jim Bauer's Dada-inspired musical set against a backdrop of historical events from the first half of the twentieth century. (West End Theatre, 263 W. 86th St. 212-352-3101.)

CELEBRITY AUTOBIOGRAPHY: IN THEIR OWN WORDS
Tony Roberts, Kristen Johnston, Rachel Dratch, and other actors read the works of famous people such as Britney Spears, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Kenny Loggins, and Burt Reynolds. Mondays only. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-868-4444.)

Viviane Hagner performs Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante with the violist Pinchas Zukerman and the Manhattan School of Music Chamber Sinfonia on Feb. 16.

PETER HAPAK

COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA
Although little actually happens in William Inge's 1950 drama, the sound of the seismic plates of feeling and manipulation shifting beneath the drama's flat surface is shattering—if you listen. Lola (the remarkable S. Epatha Merkerson), a former beauty queen and current negligent housewife, is desperate to be noticed, especially by her alcoholic husband, Doc (the solid Kevin Anderson). While Lola thinks that everything she does is fresh and spontaneous—that's part of the self-delusion that hangs like a fog over the play—we can easily see the redundancy in her behavior, from spying on her boarder, Marie (Zoe Kazan), to calling for her long-lost dog, Sheba, who "just vanished one day." Aside from the strident Kazan, who plays the rotten ingénue a bit too conspicuously, the show's director, Michael Pressman, has assembled a dream ensemble; his choice of Merkerson is a wonderful bit of color-blind casting. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/4/08.) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

DEEP TRANCE BEHAVIOR IN POTATOLAND
The latest avant-garde spectacle from Richard Foreman and his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre is rife with the sort of otherworldliness that's made his work beloved for so long. Elements include a set decorated with pianos, clocks, urns, spirit photographs, and a crooked cabinet; two screens playing videos shot in Japan and England; vampish-catatonic actresses; and a fanged actor in an eye patch. Bits of text, onscreen, spoken, and recorded, say things like "the feeling of no feeling . . . that deep feeling," and, every few minutes, there's a cacophony of heavy-machinery noise and a flood of near-blinding light directed at the audience. Though moments of wit, such as the entrance of a giant hummingbird, begin to carry us off to where Foreman wants us to go, the mayhem is, over all, too self-conscious to be totally transporting. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101.)

HUNTING AND GATHERING
Leigh Silverman directs this play by Brooke Berman, about four twenty-something New Yorkers. The Primary Stages production stars Michael Chernus, Mamie Gummer, Keira Naughton, and Jeremy Shamos. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE MADDENING TRUTH
Martha Gellhorn was a novelist, travel writer, and journalist—and an adventurous, free-spirited modern woman—who filed brave dispatches from some of the twentieth century's most dangerous war zones. In a series of scenes limning her personal and professional life, jumping from the nineteen-seventies to the forties and back again, the playwright David Hay imagines Gellhorn engaging some of the men in her life (including her second husband, Ernest Hemingway) in conversations on the nature of writing. Directed by Carl Forsman, Lisa Emery is sharp in the lead role, but Hay lets the action flag in the second act, with a re-creation of a reading Gellhorn did for the BBC. It turns out that, in this drama, discussions about the theory of literature are more interesting than the stuff itself. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Feb. 17.)

NOVEMBER
David Mamet's new Oval Office satire (well directed by Joe Mantello) is a hilarious demonstration of the fact that we live in an age of equality: all classes are criminal. The President of the United States, Charles H. P. Smith (Nathan Lane), is on the eve of losing his bid for a second term. Orchestrated with Lane's pitch-perfect timing, the poetry of Mamet's pugnacity—with all its half notes of contempt, rage, and terror—really swings. (1/28/08) (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

OFFENDING THE AUDIENCE
A curtain is drawn, and twenty-one actors in black (members of the Bats, the Flea's resident

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company) embark on an hour-long fusillade of pronouncements—"You will see no spectacle"; "You will see no play"—whose blunt purpose is to demolish the fourth wall. Peter Handke's Pirandellian tone poem was written in 1966, and despite its constant harping on the "now" it can't shake the musty scent of sixties minimalism. Under the direction of Jim Simpson, the actors trade off lines with remarkable fluidity, each bearing the smirk of a college student who has just discovered the pleasure of challenging complacency. Is the play a museum piece? Perhaps, but it still has the ability to amuse and to annoy, if not to offend. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

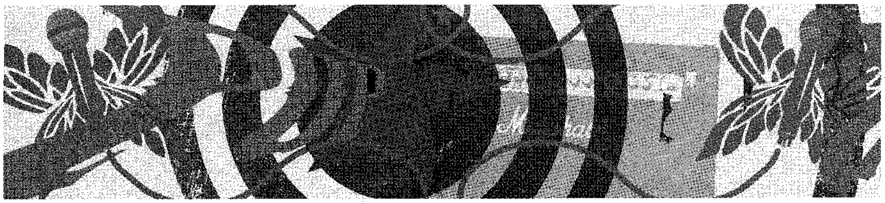
SISTERS, SUCH DEVOTED SISTERS
Russell Barr wrote and performs this semiautobiographical account of life as a Glasgow drag queen—a life, we discover, that is anything but pretty. As Bernice, a glam kleptomaniac, Barr tells increasingly harrowing tales of cracked relatives and of savage, drug-fuelled sprees through Scotland's gay underworld. (His "sisters" are a set of violent trannies who wield platform shoes like mallets.) While Barr's narration is appealingly disjointed and coarse, his hardened, nearly affectless delivery is distancing to a fault. Despite the dark humor inherent in Bernice's anecdotes, Michael Imperioli has directed the story with an overdose of nihilism, which, rather than endearing the character to us, reinforces the pernicious archetype of the self-loathing transvestite. (Studio Dante, 257 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444. Through Feb. 16.)

THREE TRAVELERS
Travis, a wise-ass New York financier, Mavis, his emotionally constricted wife, and their sophisticated English friend, Lydia, travel to a ruined temple in India for a quick hit of spirituality. The guru they seek is a jolly, enigmatic trickster who takes cell-phone calls, leads the group in a singalong of "My Darling Clementine," and does a pretty mean tango. Kenneth Maharaj brings a fair dose of wit to his characterization of the modern wise man, whose approach owes as much to Tony Robbins as it does to the Buddha. But as the dynamics among the travellers become apparent, Richard Abrons's play, directed by Jay Broad, proves a stale domestic dish with an unconvincing dash of curry. (Theatre at St. Clements, 423 W. 46th St. 212-279-4200. Through Feb. 17.)

Also Playing

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY: Imperial, 245 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **A BRONX TALE:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Through Feb. 10. **THE FARNSWORTH INVENTION:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **FUERZABRUTA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **THE HOMECOMING:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **IS HE DEAD?:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **JUMP:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-307-4100. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **THE LITTLE MERMAID:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747. **THE MAIN(E) PLAY:** Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Feb. 9. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **THE MANDRAKE:** Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. Through Feb. 10. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NEW JERUSALEM:** Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101. Through Feb. 10. **PIAF: LOVE CONQUERS ALL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. Through Feb. 10. **ROCK 'N' ROLL:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **RUNT OF THE LITTER:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **THE SEAFARER:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **SPEECH & DEBATE:** Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **TROJAN WOMEN:** Harlem Stage Gatehouse, 150 Convent Ave., at 135th St. 212-281-9240. Through Feb. 10. **2.5 MINUTE RIDE:** Altered Stages, 212 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444. Through Feb. 9. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—The new-music composer **Lawrence D. (Butch) Morris** is in residence on Wednesdays through Feb. 20, leading an ensemble of expert improvisers with his "conduction" method (he employs hand and baton gestures to create live compositions). The lineup includes the saxophonist **Michael Attias** and the double-bass players **Eivind Opsvik** and **Reuben Radding.** Feb. 14: The New York-based vocalist **Marta Topferova,** who fell in love with Spanish, Cuban, and South American music as a young child in her native Prague, shares her passion for Cuban *son* and *guajira.*



POP NOTES
TORCH AND TWANG

When the British singer Dusty Springfield went to American Studios in Memphis, in 1968, to work with the producers Jerry Wexler and Arif Mardin and the engineer Tom Dowd, the hope was that they could do for Springfield what they did for Aretha Franklin—infuse her vocals with both earthy and empyrean qualities. The resulting album, "Dusty in Memphis," was hailed as Springfield's finest, and it has aged perfectly, which is to say not at all. On **"Just a Little Lovin'"** (Lost Highway), the country-rock singer Shelby Lynne has decided, for the most part, to cover songs associated with Springfield, including a handful from "Dusty in Memphis." It's an interesting conceit—Springfield was primarily an interpreter, while Lynne has made her career as a powerful vocalist and sharp songwriter, especially on albums such as "I Am Shelby Lynne" and "Identity Crisis." From the first, it's clear that this is not simply a retread: Lynne and her producer, Phil Ramone, slow down most of the tempos and strip down most of the arrangements. The result is a shift in tone away from Springfield's approach (which used false cheer to suggest a deep mournfulness) toward something sparser and bleaker. It works sometimes, most notably on "The Look of Love" (Ramone produced Springfield's original), but other songs are flattened out by this treatment, and there are too few opportunities for Lynne to get back on her heels and belt out big notes. "Son of a Preacher Man," the original album's most famous track, is absent here, presumably because it has become too familiar. The project could have used its energy. In the end, the record is a fitting tribute to both women: it will send listeners back to Springfield's albums and send Lynne back to her own excellent songwriting.

The Canadian singer K. D. Lang, has, as often as not, sung other people's songs; she started off as a traditional country vocalist, and her last album offered renditions of songs by Canadian songwriters. On **"Watershed"** (Nonesuch), her newest album, she wrote all the material, as on her breakthrough record, "Ingénue," back in 1992. Her vocals remain spectacular, rapturous in a way that recalls vocalists like Julie London but with contemporary coolness. What is most interesting about "Watershed" is also what is most problematic. Lang's own writing is intelligent, heartfelt, and appealing, but it can also be too sedate for its own good, without hooks or crescendos. Even so, the album succeeds in much the same way as "Ingénue" did, letting Lang shine a light out from her frozen torch songs.

—Ben Greenman

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"
Feb. 7: The singer-songwriter and producer **Joe Henry,** whose restless spirit has taken him from alt-country to experimental pop, sometimes with sublime results, stops by with songs from his latest release, "Civilians." His band here will be fleshed out by the jazz pianist **Brad Mehldau.** Feb. 8: The veteran soul singer **Bettye LaVette,** whose 2005 comeback album, "I've Got My Own Hell to Raise," was produced by the previous night's performer, Joe Henry. Feb. 9: The edgy and inventive pop of **David Yazbek,** who composed the score and wrote the lyrics for "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" and "The Full Monty." With the prickly cabaret songs of **Nellie McKay.** (Allen Room, Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Feb. 10: The "Lucifer Over America" tour features a hodgepodge of death-metal bands from around the world, including Greece's **Rotting Christ,** Austria's **Belphegor,** the local lads in **Immolation,** and the Texans in **Averse Sefira.** Their respective mother tongues may differ, but they are united in their devotion to blasphemy, monster vocals, and ear-splitting rock. Feb. 14: **Roberta Flack** has one of the most beautiful voices of her generation, but her predilection for schmalz has sometimes painted her into a corner. Still, "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" and "Killing Me Softly with His Song" are part of music history.

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—Feb. 15: **Sharon Jones** and the **Dap-Kings.** The late-blooming Jones—she worked as a corrections officer before turning to music full time, in her early forties—was born in Augusta, Georgia, which is also the birthplace of James Brown. Like the late, great Godfather of Soul, she knows how to command an audience. Jones has put out a series of old-school albums with her band, a sharp-dressing,

JOHN RITTER

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK ON ROUTE 66

It's hard to think of any other movie that splits into great and mediocre parts as evenly and obviously as John Ford's adaptation of John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath," from 1940 (at Moving Image on Feb. 17). Hailed as a classic when it was published, the year before, the novel is devoted to the Joads, an Oklahoma sharecropper family who leave their land, after repeated dust storms, and journey to the promised

paradise of California, where they become migrant agricultural workers. All the scenes of the family travelling through the Southwestern landscape are magnificent. The cinematography is by Gregg Toland, and some moments, such as the truck's slow entry into a laborers' camp, are as haunting as photographs by Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and other great documentary artists of the period. But the family scenes, staged by Ford in the emotion-saturated style of late-thirties Hollywood, are no better than conventionally touching. Henry Fonda, as young Tom Joad, an ex-con, is the exception; he gives a tough, hard-edged performance.

—*David Denby*

horn-heavy ensemble that has become an in-demand session group in its own right (they're the folks who gave Amy Winehouse's hit "Rehab" much of its throwback appeal). Jones's latest release with the group is called "100 Days, 100 Nights."

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY

127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—Feb. 9: Unable to coax their notoriously grouchy former lead singer, Paul Weller, back from his successful solo career, the remaining two-thirds of the legendary British punk-era trio the Jam—the bassist Bruce Foxton and the drummer Rick Buckler—have reconvened as **From the Jam** to revisit their salad days as high-kicking, sharp-dressed neo-Mods. Weller's signature voice and incendiary guitar playing will be missed, but From the Jam will do their best to re-create the original lineup's fiery verve.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Feb. 8: The local favorites **Nada Surf.** Feb. 13: **Yeasayer** and **MGMT** (see the Music Hall of Williamsburg). Feb. 14: The **Gutter Twins.** As lead singers of the Afghan Whigs and the Screaming Trees, respectively, Greg Dulli and Mark Lanegan were two of the preëminent voices of the alternative-rock movement in the nineties. More recently, Dulli and Lanegan have pursued acclaimed and unpredictable careers (Dulli with the Twilight Singers and Lanegan as both a solo artist and with the Queens of the Stone Age). The Gutter Twins is their new collaboration, which finds both vocalists plumbing noirish depths on a hotly anticipated début album, "Saturnalia."

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Feb. 8-9: **Siouxsie Sioux.** Following her involvement with the Banshees and the end of her days with the Creatures (the collaboration she pursued with her former husband, the drummer Budgie), Sioux has finally struck out on her own. Her solo début, "Mantaray," which came out toward the end of last year, proves that the great lady's best days are far from over.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Feb. 9: High decibels, furious tempos, and mosh-pit skirmishes are the order of the day as **Wisdom in Chains, Death Before Dishonor, Bloodclot,** and the **Unseen** join their genre forefathers and local legends **Sick of It All** for an evening of bruising hardcore. Feb. 14: The **Syd Straw Heartwreck Show.** The gifted vocalist, who first made her name with the Golden Palominos, turns out for a Valentine's Day performance. Feb. 18: **Jake Shimabukuro,** a ukulele wunderkind from Hawaii, became a phenomenon, thanks to a video of him playing George Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," which, via YouTube, was seen around the world.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Feb. 14: **The Loser's Lounge,** a long-running tribute show honoring the pop icons of yesteryear, features local talent singing covers in styles that range from faithful-to-the-original to wildly interpretive. Over the years, the performers have tipped their hats to the likes of Lee Hazlewood, Burt Bacharach, and David Bowie. Here, they'll revive the sixties hits of the Mamas & the Papas with covers of "Dedicated to the One I Love," "Dream a Little Dream of Me," "Glad to Be Unhappy," and other suitable Valentine's Day fare. Feb. 15: The smooth-voiced singer and songwriter **David Poe** is currently working on a collaboration with Duncan Sheik, composing for film and dance, and launching, with the filmmaker Amy Berg, the U.S. Campaign, an initiative to produce and release on the Internet short films about the war in Iraq, the subprime-mortgage crisis, global warming, and other issues. Later on Feb. 15: **Free Form Funky Freqs,** a high-flying power trio born out of the ashes of the defunct music hall Tonic. Last year, when that downtown venue was closing, the guitarist Vernon Reid, the bassist Jamaaladeen Tacuma, and the drummer G. Calvin Weston had their first performance together. They had so much fun, they've kept at it.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3132)—Feb 9: The Boston-based ensemble **Beat Circus** comes to town for the début of an ambitious new Brechtian concept album, "Dreamland." Its sixteen songs frame a narrative about an impoverished nineteenth-century gold miner who loses an arm in the mines, makes a Faustian pact with the Devil to get his limb back, kills his wife, and finally joins a sideshow in Coney Island. The band, which is led by the songwriter Brian Carpenter on trumpet, pump organ, and vocals in a Tom Waits vein, mixes carnivalesque tunes with rock moments. The group's rich and tight orchestration features a Morricone-inspired combination of harmonica, viola, banjo, guitar, tuba, violin, trombone, upright bass, and drums. Also on the bill is **Nervous Cabaret,** an intense local combo with a somewhat grittier take on rock cabaret, and the Boston band **Humanwine.** Feb. 10: **Gene Loves Jezebel** started off as a Welsh post-punk band in the mid-eighties, led by the enigmatic Michael and Jay Aston, an androgynous pair of identical twin brothers. Finding a strange sonic middle ground between Aerosmith and Adam & the Ants, the band was initially embraced by the goth community. Then Gene Loves Jezebel morphed into a more marketable incarnation as an ersatz hair-metal ensemble. That messy transformation precipitated a schism between the Aston twins, and only Michael remains with the band. Their touring mates, **Spear of Destiny,** also date back to the Reagan era, and they trade in swashbuckling rock with elements of rockabilly and spaghetti-Western theatrics. Feb. 14: **Diamanda Galas's** annual Valentine's Day Massacre. The unique, confrontational, and uncompromising Galas brings her oft-piercing voice, righteous indignation, and unflinching conviction to the intimate Knitting Factory stage. Though her music can be soulful, bluesy, fragile, and cathartic, Galas is also capable of using her pipes like a vexed archangel intent on merciless retribution. The weak of heart are advised to proceed with caution.

"LET'S ZYDECO"

Feb. 17: The concert series dedicated to the various indigenous musical forms of Louisiana brings in **Steve Riley** and the **Mamou Playboys.** Growing up in the little town of Mamou, Riley played accordion in the band of the legendary fiddler Dewey Balfa. Since forming his own band, he has become a tireless ambassador of Cajun culture. (Connolly's, 121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597, or visit www.letszydeco.com.)

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Feb. 19: The **Foo Fighters,** who are led by the former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl, reportedly the "nicest guy in rock."

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG

66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Feb. 14: The Brooklyn quartet **Yeasayer** is riding a wave of buzz for its mix of indie rock and outré African, Bollywood, and Middle Eastern influences. They follow the globe-trotting path blazed by David Byrne and Paul Simon, but, guided by the ghost of Syd Barrett, they seem less interested in crossover pop success than in mind-bending experimentation. With the goofy and utterly charming electro-pop of **MGMT,** a pair of friends from Wesleyan who run the risk of actually getting to experience the rock-and-roll life style they skewer so well on their single, "Time to Pretend."

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE

Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Feb. 8: Seattle's **Queensrÿche** has been making ambitiously cinematic, demi-operatic art rock for more than two decades. Though they're renowned for their sprawling concept albums, their most recent studio foray, "Take Cover," finds them performing songs by artists like Peter Gabriel, the Police, and Pink Floyd, the latter being a sizable influence on their work. With **Don Dokken,** the former lead singer of the eighties pop-metal band who bore his last name.

LARA TOMLIN

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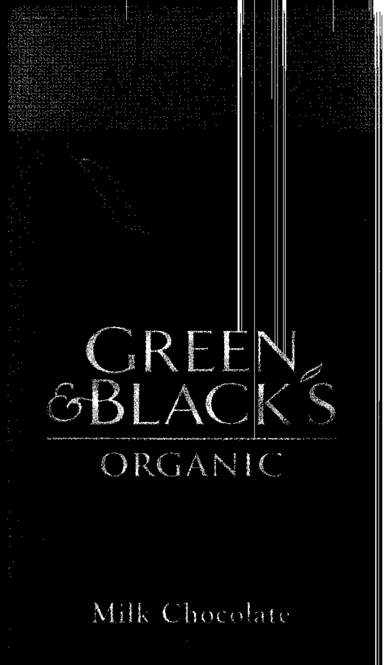

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Feb. 15: The Staten Island-based singer-songwriter **Ingrid Michaelson's** sentimental and slithery songs have popped up in living rooms across America, having been used in television commercials (for Old Navy and Chevrolet) and TV shows (such as "Grey's Anatomy"). She's seen her star rise dramatically over the last year, but she knows how to keep it real: she still lives at home with her parents.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Feb. 9: The fleet fingers of the Gypsy guitarist **Tomatito,** from Spain. Part of the New York Flamenco Festival (see Dance). (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"
Feb. 6: Although Charles Strouse will always be held accountable for "Tomorrow," the insufferable showstopper from "Annie," he is undeniably a top-drawer Broadway composer who also helped write such standards as "Put on a Happy Face," "A Lot of Livin' to Do," and "Once Upon a Time," as well "It's a Hard Knock Life," a stepping-off point for the rapper Jay-Z. The erudite singer and pianist **Eric Comstock,** joined by the vocalist Barbara Fasano and the tenor saxophonist Harry Allen, investigates Strouse's enduring work from a jazz perspective. Expect a guest appearance from the eighty-year-old legend himself. (Allen Room, Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Feb. 6-9: **Quest,** a coöperative band from the eighties consisting of the saxophonist **Dave Leibman,** the pianist **Richie Beirach,** the drummer **Billy Hart,** and the bassist **Ron McClure,** never caused the kind of stir that its collective talent should have brought it. Feb. 12-16: **John Pizzarelli** is an excellent jazz guitarist; his father, **Bucky,** a brilliant one. Together they will conduct what will amount to a master class in mainstream guitar playing.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Feb. 5-10: The drummer **Francisco Mela** is joined by two players of special promise, the organist **Sam Yahel** and the guitarist **Lionel Loueke,** a native of Benin. Feb. 12-17: Only two original members of the **Crusaders** will be present for this reunion, but the keyboardist **Joe Sample** and the saxophonist **Wilton Felder** are key to the jazz-meets-funk sound of this once pioneering band. Session heavyweights including the drummer **Steve Gadd** and the guitarist **Hiram Bullock** will join them.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—*Through March 1:* The folk goddess **Judy Collins** has long had a taste for theatrical material, even scoring a major hit with Sondheim's "Send in the Clowns," in 1975. By balancing unmannered vocalizing and autobiographical musings, Collins insures a healthy next act in her career.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Feb. 5-10: The **Stryker-Slagle Band**—a substantial unit featuring the guitarist **Dave Stryker,** the saxophonist **Steve Slagle,** the bassist **Jay Anderson,** and the drummer **Victor Lewis**—gets even beefier with the addition of the saxophonist **Joe Lovano.**

"HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ"
Feb. 14: The singer **Jane Monheit** may have been a victim of too much hype and its ensuing deflation, but don't write her off yet. She continues to evolve as an interpretive artist, and for now is sticking to jazz and standards, rather than pop or current Broadway pap, for the bulk of her repertoire. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460.)

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Feb. 7-10: The revolving membership of the jazz-fusion band **Steps Ahead** now includes the vibraphonist **Mike Mainieri,** the guitarist **Mike Stern** (here only Feb. 8-10), the bassist **Tony Levin,** and the drummer **Steve Smith.** Feb. 14-17: A visit from the celebrated West Coast-based veteran-singer **Ernestine Anderson.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Feb. 14-16: Three saxophonists, **Wess Anderson, Scott Hamilton,** and **Houston Person,** join the house orchestra and the trumpeter **Wynton Marsalis** for a performance of the love songs of Duke Ellington. Feb. 15-16, in the Allen Room: **Kurt Elling,** a vocalist who balances intellect and passion, is joined by the singer **Nancy King.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—The trumpeter **Steven Bernstein** fronts two of his most provocative ensembles: the **Millennial Territory Orchestra** (Feb. 7-9), which retools swing standards and unlikely pop tunes by channelling the high spirits of the spunky regional bands of the nineteen-thirties, and **Diaspora Suite** (Feb. 10), which forges a link between Jewish melodies, the sonorities of West Coast jazz, and Afro-Cuban grooves. Feb. 12-13: **Omer Avital** and **Band of the East.** Avital's use of the oud, alongside his customary bass, is only one of the ways he brings Middle Eastern elements to the fore in his music. His group includes the saxophonist **Joel Frahm** and the trumpeter **Avishai Cohen.**

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—Feb. 14: A night of improvisation with the saxophonist **John Zorn,** the harpist **Zeena Parkins,** and others to benefit this laboratory for experimental music. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Feb. 5-10: Those Monday-night heroes, the **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra,** get a week to themselves. On display will be their undiminished verve, imaginative charts, and dependable soloists. Feb. 12-17: **Ed Simon's** album "Unicity," from 2006, was rich in skillful interplay between the pianist and the rhythm team that joins him here—the bassist **John Patitucci** and the drummer **Brian Blade.**

TABLES FOR TWO
DELL'ANIMA

SARAH MANGERSON

38 Eighth Ave., at Jane St. (212-366-6633)—Early in the evening, the back door of this tiny *enoteca* is often left ajar, to reveal the red neon sign of the Corner Bistro across the street. Inside, youthful attitude and precocity abound. The executive chef, Gabe Thompson, previously worked at Le Bernardin and Del Posto but has never run a kitchen; the general manager, Joe Campanale, a former sommelier at Babbo, is only twenty-three years old. The patrons—suits and just-back-from-Turks-and-Caicos tans—nestle in sleek banquettes, so high that their feet dangle, or perch at a bar overlooking the chef and his two line cooks, working feverishly in a tiny open kitchen.

The food is both faithfully Italian and surprising. An order of bruschetta might include toppings of chickpeas perfumed with preserved lemon or a "lily" confit of translucent bulbs (shallot, onion, garlic) whose pallor belies its intense flavor. Glossy cuts of pork belly are strewn with persimmons that implode when pricked. In the pastas, ingredients are pleasingly textured, whether in a chunky calamari *ragù* (spooned over squid-ink fettucine, a cute joke) or a savory mix of sage, Fontina, and shaved Brussels sprouts. Standards like wild boar and seared tuna are given new contexts, the meat atop mascarpone-rich polenta, the fish surrounded by chestnuts, crisped artichoke, and a velouté-like swath of sunchoke purée. Other dishes seem designed primarily to stoke your thirst, like the chicken "al diavolo," rubbed ferociously with smoked paprika, or a salty serving of ricotta ravioli. This is food as the consort, not peer, of drink. Fortunately, the wine list is fairly democratic, although it's easy if you're ordering by the glass to wind up with a single pour that costs more than your entrée. (A dark, moody Sangiovese was a breathtaking twenty-five dollars a pop.)

Dell'Anima has a stylish brashness that can be the cause of some uneasiness. On a recent night, two long-term denizens of the neighborhood (four decades and counting) were shunted nearly out of sight in a back corner. "Anaïs Nin once lived in our building," one of them said. The couple reminisced about the site's former tenant, Freddy Ristorante, where they'd often celebrated New Year's Eve, then admitted that they did, in fact, like Dell'Anima's food. Still, they couldn't quite give their hearts to the new kid on the block. "The people moving in here now aren't artists," the wife said wistfully. "They're businessmen." (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $15-$25.)

—*Ligaya Mishan*

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions."** Opens Feb. 12. ♦ **"Jasper Johns: Gray."** Through May 4. ♦ **"Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary."** Through March 2. ♦ **"Tara Donovan at the Met."** Through April 27. ♦ **"Lee Friedlander: A Ramble in Olmsted Parks."** Through May 11. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Lucian Freud: The Painter's Etchings."** Through March 10. ♦ **"Multiplex: Directions in Art, 1970 to Now."** Through July 28. ♦ **"Jan De Cock: Denkmal 11."** Through April 14. ♦ **"New Perspectives in Latin American Art, 1930-2006: Selections from a Decade of Acquisitions."** Through Feb. 25. ♦ **"Projects 86: Gert & Uwe Tobias."** Through Feb. 25. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"From Berlin to New York: Karl Nierendorf and the Guggenheim."** Through May 4. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Lawrence Weiner: As Far As the Eye Can See."** Through

Feb. 10. ♦ **"Beth Campbell: Following Room."** Through Feb. 24. ♦ **"Television Delivers People."** Through Feb. 17. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Ghada Amer: Love Has No End."** Opens Feb. 16. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Water: H_2O=Life."** Through May 26. ♦ Around five hundred specimens flit through the Butterfly Conservatory, a pocket-size hothouse planted with orchids and other rain-forest flora. Through May 26. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Parmigianino's Antea: A Beautiful Artifice."** Through April 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"The Collections of Barbara Bloom."** Through May 4. ♦ **"Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art."** Through May 4. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"From The New Yorker to Shrek: The Art of William Steig."** Through March 16. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Michelangelo, Vasari, and Their Contemporaries: Drawings from the Uffizi."** Through April 20. ♦ **"Close Encounters: Irving Penn Portraits of Artists and Writers."** Through April 13. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Under New York Skies: Nocturnes by Yvonne Jacquette."** Through April 13. ♦ **"Street Dance: The New York Photographs of Rudy Burkhardt."** Through April 13. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—The museum inaugurates its new building with **"Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century,"** an international survey of recent sculpture that examines the antiheroic tendency in contemporary art. Through March 23. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution."** Opens Feb. 17. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JANE FREILICHER
Freilicher's lovely canvases provide an antidote to winter: a dose of summer scenery in the midst of the chill. They also play a clever perceptual game by contrasting near and far fields of vision. Cut flowers in vases occupy the foregrounds, while bucolic landscapes or rectilinear cityscapes recede into the distance. The details are fuzzy, the colors muted, and the works are deliciously impressionistic. Freilicher, a longtime New York School fixture, painted the cityscapes from her penthouse Manhattan studio and the landscapes, with their horizontal strips of marsh, grass, and blue water, from her home in Water Mill, Long Island. Through Feb. 23. (Tibor de Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050.)

KATY GRANNAN
Grannan's two-gallery show of big color photographs is an event for anyone interested in contemporary portraiture. Uptown, her subject is a young woman named Nicole who often seems on the verge of a meltdown. Writhing naked in the sand or laughing hysterically in a field of flowers, she's a wild thing, as fascinating as she is frightening. Grannan pins her down like a butterfly and lets us examine the once pretty creature, now sadly damaged. Downtown, Gail and Dale, a pair of aging transsexuals, pose awkwardly in matronly clothes and in the nude. Tanyth Berkeley has a surer feel for the allure of the grotesque, but Grannan still makes a knockout picture. Through Feb. 16. (Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444; Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through Feb. 23.)

KATI HECK
Wacky tableaux feature classically painted figures that disintegrate into cartoon chaos, usually in the legs and feet. Heavy wooden frames suggest a certain German austerity, undercut by canvases in which three people stand around a campfire in their underclothes roasting a bratwurst, and a nude figure's torso twists to an impossible, Surrealist silliness. At times, Heck ventures into Neo Rauch territory, rendering bits of Teutonic architecture in the background, and there is more than a little Martin Kippenberger slapstick in the mix. It sounds like a winning combination, but, while the Antwerp-based German painter uses her academic chops to send up history painting and the figurative tradition, the outcome feels forced. Through March 1. (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-752-2929.)

AL TAYLOR
Taylor (1948-1999), a studio assistant of Rauschenberg's in the seventies and early eighties, picked up the Master's Dumpster-diving ways. But unlike Rauschenberg's "combines," Taylor's sculptures are simple, elegant, and spare. Several are constructed from a cache of discarded broomsticks found by the artist. Their enamel-paint surfaces are soulfully weathered, and the compositions resemble an arrangement of giant pickup sticks on the wall. A few veer from pure abstraction, suggesting fanciful musical instruments. While Taylor considered himself to be a painter drawing in space, you can detect parallels with like-minded sculptors, from Calder and Tatlin to contemporaries such as Fred Sandback. Through March 1. (Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677.)

Short List

JOHN CHAMBERLAIN: PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Opens Feb. 14. **WILLIAM KENTRIDGE:** Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Feb. 16. **CHRIS WARE:** Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338. Through March. 15. **"HANSEL AND GRETEL":** Gallery Met, Lincoln Center Plaza, at 65th St. 212-870-7441. Through Feb. 29.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

LEE BAXTER DAVIS
In Davis's fanciful ink-and-wash drawings, a fish dangles from a parachute, a lady cowpoke in a see-through blouse rides the range, a bare-breasted tank driver talks to an ostrich, and a kilt-wearing commando draws a bead on his battered hobbyhorse, as a lion paces the beach in the background. In the back gallery, a trio of resin-coated flashe drawings on canvas by James Benjamin Franklin includes a scene of Jesus as a gallerist discussing post-minimal sculpture with a client. Through Feb. 16. (Clementine, 623 W. 27th St. 212-243-5937.)

HANS HAACKE
This five-piece survey of Haacke's career starts with grainy black-and-white photographs that he took in 1959 as a young assistant at Documenta 2 in Kassel: candid portraits of the post-Second World War bourgeoisie confronting modern art. "Wide White Flow," conceived in 1967, is a giant sheet of white silk that undulates—like clouds or waves—thanks to electric fans. The work's lyric restraint is in contrast to the Conceptualist agitprop for which the artist is best known, seen here in "Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social

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System as of May 1, 1971"—one of Haacke's famous photo-documents about slumlords. Rounding out the show are two more recent works, which critique the Bush dynasty, including a torn blue-and-white print of stars without stripes. Through Feb. 16. (Cooper, *534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.*)

NICHOLAS NIXON

Nixon, best known for his annual portraits of his wife and her sisters ("The Brown Sisters" series, now in its thirty-third year), has also tackled difficult topics—like people with AIDS and the residents of nursing homes—with sympathy and tact. His newest black-and-white photographs are of Boston hospital patients, and few of them are easy to look at. Working at their bedsides with an old-fashioned, tripod-mounted view camera, Nixon brings us uncomfortably close to men, women, and babies in visible distress. His results are sometimes tender and powerful, but too often our intimacy with his subjects feels unearned and intrusive. Through Feb. 16. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

JOHN O'REILLY

This survey of O'Reilly's deft photocollages traces recurring themes and motifs in work from the past forty-two years. Mining history, both personal and universal, the artist leaps centuries within a few intricately pieced-together square inches, from Achilles to Eakins to Picasso to a Nazi soldier's scrapbook. The male nude—whether academic, pornographic, or as prosaic as a snapshot—provides a reliable throughline, but homoeroticism is just one of the elements in O'Reilly's sprawling patchwork of memory, mythology, fantasy, and desire. Cornell, Jess, and Ernst are touchstones here, but O'Reilly is in a world of his own. Through Feb. 16. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

MAI-THU PERRET

The Russian avant-garde is resurrected in Perret's installation, which takes a 1924 agitprop theatre performance as its source. Three videos, projected against wallpaper with a looping abstract motif, include dancers moving through a Constructivist set and costumes based on designs by Varvara Stepanova. A ball made with neon tubes is more Futurist than Flavin, and a mannequin seated over a carpet stained with Day-Glo-green Rorschach blobs is merely puzzling. Hanne Darboven and Rosemarie Trockel are possible inspirations, but unlike those artists Perret dabbles in politics without getting down to brass tacks. Sure, Russian Constructivism conveyed its message with dashing prole style. But back in that era the new art for a new society packed more punch than Perret musters in this tepid recycling. Through March 8. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

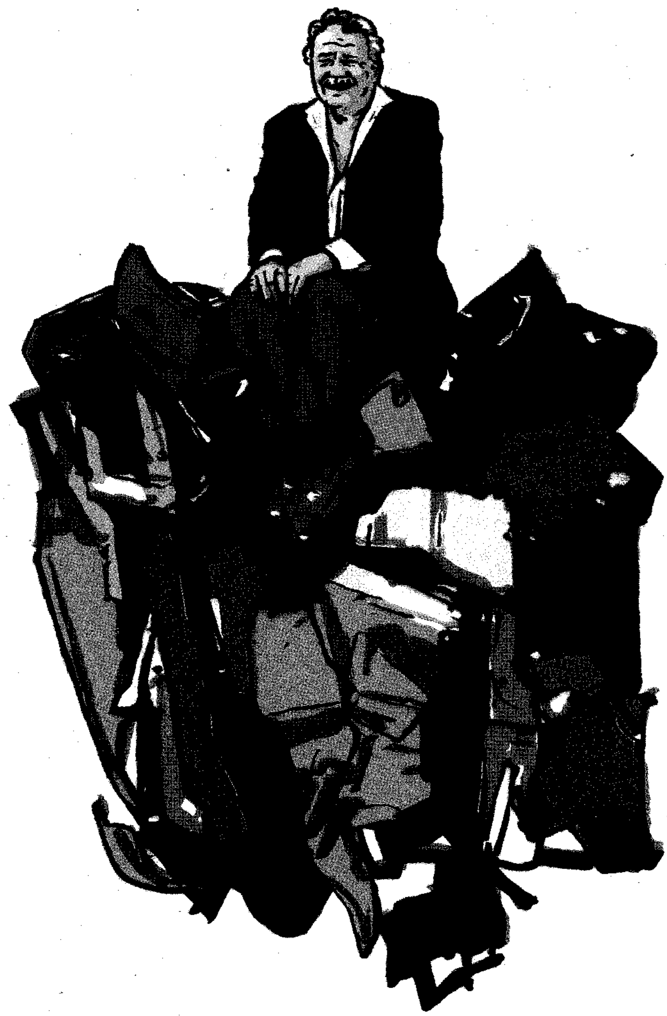
Short List

ELLEN BERKENBLIT / ANNE COLLIER: Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Feb. 23. **ROBERT GOBER:** Marks, 521 W. 21st St.; 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through March 29. **KAREN KILIMNIK:** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Feb. 23. **SHIRIN NESHAT:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-906-9300. Through Feb. 23. **SETH PRICE:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Opens Feb. 9.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

JAN GROOVER

Groover's latest still-life photographs are tightly cropped arrangements of signature objects—pears, apples, ceramic vases, painted bottles—on tabletop spaces defined by looming forms in galvanized steel. The results are at once architectural and abstract: fun-house jumbles of eccentric shapes, funky textures, and reflected color. Because the burnished-steel pieces with their frost-like flecking dominate, Groover's color scheme is more muted than usual, allowing her to use blue, yellow, and apple-green items for maximum effect—a burst of Léger's poster-paint palette in spaces that might have been designed by a depressive Kurt Schwitters. Through Feb. 23. (Borden, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-431-0166.)



An exhibition of recent works by the sculptor John Chamberlain opens at PaceWildenstein on Feb. 14.

JEROEN KOOLHAAS

JACKIE SACCOCCIO

By titling her show "Interrupted Grid," Saccoccio invites you to look for the linear structure underpinning her exuberant paintings. It's there, in stripes and squares, between drips and patches of bright color. Saccoccio's work is more about juicing up expressive abstraction than toying with linear geometry, but one hesitates to pin her down as a latter-day Abstract Expressionist (although the label generally fits). The idea of holding abstraction accountable to an underlying system may not be new, but it's miles away from the free-ranging gestures of de Kooning and company, and, in Saccoccio's hands, it looks fresh. Through Feb. 9. (Eleven Rivington, 11 Rivington St. 212-982-1930.)

Short List

MICHEL GONDRY: Deitch, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Opens Feb. 16. **KATY GRANNAN:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through Feb. 23. **KLARA LIDEN:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Through March 9. **"DIEBENKORN IN NEW MEXICO":** Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780. Through April 5.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

On Feb. 7, Christopher Wheeldon will present "Rococo Variations," his final work as resident choreographer before dedicating himself to his new company, Morphoses. For his swan song, the versatile Wheeldon has created a quartet for four of the company's younger dancers (including the eloquent Sara Mearns), set to Tchaikovsky's charming suite of variations for cello and orchestra. At the Feb. 10 matinée, the profound and vivid Danish-born danseur Nikolaj Hübbe (who is departing to become the artistic director of the Royal Danish Ballet) will have a farewell performance with his incomparable rendition of "Apollo," Peter Martins's "Zakouski," the "Cool" number from Robbins's "West Side Story Suite," and Balanchine's "Western Symphony." Casts are announced on the company's Web site a week in advance. ♦ Feb. 5-6 at 7:30: "Double Feature." ♦ Feb. 7-8 at 8, Feb. 16 at 2, and Feb. 19 at 7:30: "Divertimento from 'Le Baiser de la Fée,' " "The Chairman Dances," "Rococo Variations," and "Stars and Stripes." ♦ Feb. 9 at 2 and Feb. 12 at 7:30: "The Goldberg Variations," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "Western Symphony." ♦ Feb. 9 and Feb. 15 at 8 and Feb. 13 at 7:30: "Thou Swell," "Ives, Songs," and "West Side Story Suite." ♦ Feb. 10 at 3 (Nikolaj Hübbe farewell): "Apollo," "Zakouski," "West Side Story Suite," and "Western Symphony." ♦ Feb. 14 at 8 and Feb. 17 at 3: "Raymonda Variations," "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," "The Nightingale and the Rose," and "Robert Schumann's 'Davidsbündlertänze.' " ♦ Feb. 16 at 8: "Serenade," "Mozartiana," and "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through Feb. 24.)

TRISHA BROWN DANCE COMPANY

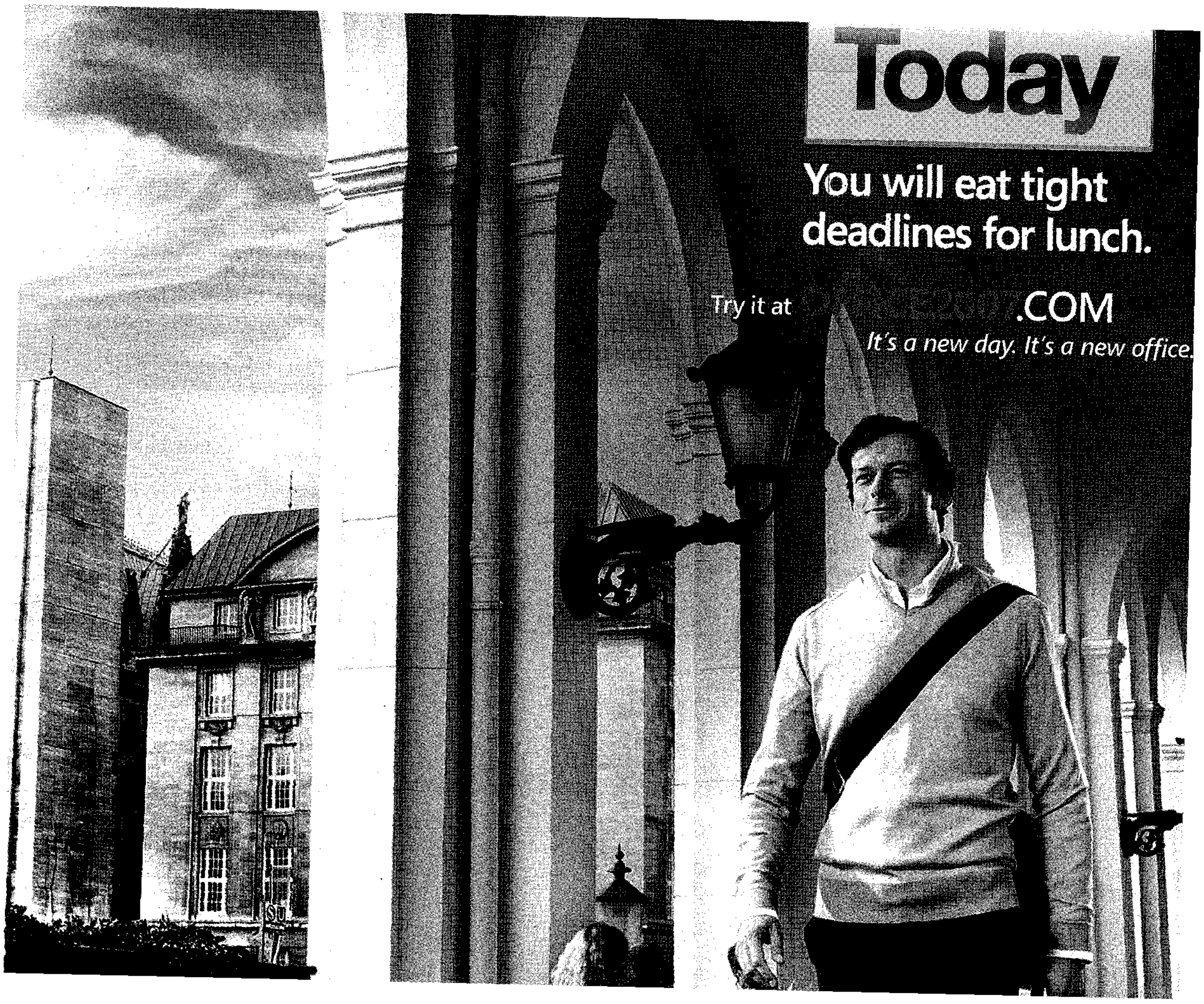
The company performs Brown's "Foray Forêt," "I Love My Robots," and "If You Couldn't See Me." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 5-6 at 7:30, Feb. 7-9 at 8, and Feb. 10 at 2 and 7:30.)

CHUNKY MOVE

"Glow," the newest work by Gideon Obarzanek, the director of this company from Australia, eliminates one of dance's most common characteristics—verticality. Obarzanek places the dancer on the ground and uses her body as a backdrop for live, computer-generated light designs and graphics. As the soloist creates fluid shapes, an infrared camera captures her movements and communicates them to a computer, which produces a graphic response that is then projected onto the dancer, generating striking effects: an aura, a constellation, and even something like an aurora borealis. (Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Feb. 7-9 at 7:30 and 9:30 and Feb. 10 at 2 and 3:30.)

DIANA SZEINBLUM

At the start of the Argentinean choreographer's "Alaska," a man in a suit slumps in a chair with a sign around his neck that reads, in Spanish, "I'm Desperate." The dancers treat each other like action figures—bending limbs into odd positions, ripping off clothing—and handle their own bodies as if they were trying to dislocate something. Aided by an evocative score, played live, Szeinblum keeps up the kinetic interest while sustaining the mood. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Feb. 7-9 at 7:30.)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DEBORAH HAY
In partnership with Dance Theatre Workshop, Danspace Project presents a mini-festival based on the choreography of the Judson School experimentalist. (See "Solo Adaptations.") The Danspace portion is a remounting of Hay's "O,O," performed here in 2006, with a new cast composed entirely of France-based artists. Since Hay's work—both ordered and whimsical—is partly improvised and performer-determined, a new cast means a new dance. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Feb. 7-9 at 8:30.)

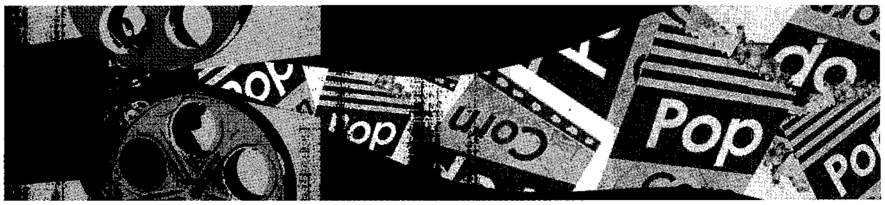
NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET
Diana Byer's admirable chamber ballet presents a celebration of Antony Tudor and José Limón, two radically different but equally transformative dance visionaries, on their centenary. Works include a revival of Tudor's great psychological ballet from 1936, "Jardin aux Lilas," staged by the respected Tudor specialist Sallie Wilson, as well as a company première of "Mazurkas," Limón's 1958 chamber work set to Chopin piano pieces, staged by the former Limón company dancer Sarah Stackhouse. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-679-0401. Feb. 8-9 at 7:30.)

"STARS OF THE 21ST CENTURY"
This yearly star-studded sampler of the international ballet scene offers a peek at some of the hottest dancers from major companies in classic ballet pas de deux, as well as the chance to see local favorites (in this case, David Hallberg, of American Ballet Theatre, and Maria Kowroski, of New York City Ballet, dancing Balanchine) in rare cross-company pairings. This year's edition includes the swashbuckling Denis Matvienko and his gorgeous wife and partner, Anastasia, both with the Mikhailovsky Opera and Ballet; David Makhateli, of the Royal, and Myriam Ould-Braham, of the Opéra de Paris; Svetlana Lunkina and Nikolai Tsiskaridze, of the Bolshoi; and more. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Feb. 11 at 7:30.)

"SOLO ADAPTATIONS"
Dance Theatre Workshop joins with Danspace Project for a mini-festival based on the choreography of the nineteen-sixties veteran Deborah Hay. (See listing above.) Here, four performers from France (Emmanuelle Huynh and Jennifer Lacey on Monday, Laurent Pichaud and Sylvain Prunenec on Tuesday) present their versions of Hay's solo "Room." Each dancer is allowed to add production elements (music, costumes, lighting, etc.) but must follow the sequence of the dance, which can be altered only by subtraction. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Feb. 11-12 at 7:30.)

RONALD K. BROWN/EVIDENCE
"One Shot" takes its inspiration from Charles (Teenie) Harris, the late photographic chronicler of African-American life in Pittsburgh, and its title from one of his nicknames. With a new rationale for Brown's standard practice, the dance is episodic. The disparate jazz and Afro-Cuban songs strung together suggest a continuity, as all of Brown's spirit-stirring choreography does. A second, repertory program includes his Nina Simone tribute, "Come Ye," and "Upside Down," with live music by the Afro-beat singer Wunmi. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 12-13 at 7:30, Feb. 14-15 at 8, Feb. 16 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 17 at 2 and 7:30.)

KOTA YAMAZAKI/FLUID HUG-HUG
92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival opens with two works by the multicultural Japanese choreographer and her company. "Picnic . . . for Men," which Yamazaki describes as a valentine to New York's gay night-club scene, is a goofy romp for an international male septet. Constructed out of Yamazaki's crazy-quilt blend of Butoh, hip-



DVD NOTES
THE EYES HAVE IT

Harry Langdon, the fourth and most elusive of the great silent comics (alongside Chaplin, Keaton, and Harold Lloyd), is also, in some ways, the most modern—which explains why he remains on the margins of movie history. The films featured in the four-disk set **"The Harry Langdon Collection: Lost and Found"** (Facets) suggest both the grandeur and the limits of his art.

Langdon's screen persona was a constant: whether playing a henpecked husband, a steadfast homebody, or a prodigal son, he remained a mild, beleaguered Everyman, but his travails came with no overriding moral. He passed through his films with a puckish, mercurial grace that was defined by a single, narrative-piercing act: the look into the camera. Langdon played to the viewer with a steady stream of rapid, quizzical glances, externalized glints of self-consciousness that presented him to spectators not as an actor but simply as himself, outside any dramatic framework. As a result, he was at his best in unhinged slapstick, where character hardly mattered; he fit uneasily into more developed plots and made a clumsy transition to sound films. Langdon remains Langdon: we know him uncomfortably intimately, yet hardly at all.

The changeover to sound posed few problems for the great comedy director Ernst Lubitsch. His first talking film, "The Love Parade," from 1929—featured in **"Lubitsch Musicals"** (Criterion)—also begins with the frame-breaking gesture of an actor speaking to the camera, as Maurice Chevalier, a suave philanderer embroiled in a boudoir argument in French, turns to the viewer and translates. With this gesture, Lubitsch provided ironic perspective on the furious lust that governs the antic plot, about a scandalous diplomat's seduction of a queen. Despite the film's brilliant inventions and suggestive touches (including the obscene placement of a bridegroom's sword as he approaches the altar), the songs stop the action dead.

By 1932, with "One Hour with You," also starring Chevalier, Lubitsch (aided by George Cukor) ingeniously integrated songs into the action—by turning them into spoken patter that Chevalier often addresses to the viewer. This remake of Lubitsch's silent 1924 drawing-room farce, "The Marriage Circle," boils its casual and endemic adultery down to a judgment-free axiom. Where Langdon's furtive glances bleed the drama dry with a thousand pinpricks, Chevalier's hearty ruse, as in the song "What Would You Do?," draws the viewer too close to cast the first stone.

—*Richard Brody*

hop, and African dance, plus vocalizations, the piece makes you laugh and then wonder if you should be laughing. The much shorter "April-May-June," a study of three women who struggle to synchronize their movements, completes the program. (Ailey Citigroup Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 13-14 and Feb. 16 at 8 and Feb. 17 at 2.)

NEW YORK FLAMENCO FESTIVAL
This year's opening gala showcases three generations of women: Merche Esmeralda, Belén Maya, and the young festival favorite, Rocío Molina. Eva Yerbabuena, the festival's most trustworthy regular, returns with "Santo y Seña," a "best of" program. Four men get tasteful group numbers; the star gets the solos, including a *soleá* that plumbs the depths without any distracting razzle-dazzle. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Feb. 15 at 7:30, Feb. 16 at 8, and Feb. 17 at 7.)

"SUGAR SALON"
This mentoring program for women choreographers, fostered by the Barnard Dance Department and the Williamsburg Arts NeXus, presents the fruits of a ten-week residency by three interesting up-and-coming artists: the Uruguayan-born Luciana Achugar, Renée Archibald, and Heather McArdle, a veteran of Diavolo Dance Theatre. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Feb. 15-16 at 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Deborah Voigt, embracing new vocal challenges these days, will return to familiar territory when she takes back the role of Sieglinde in **"Die Walküre."** The impressive cast also features Lisa Gasteen, Michelle DeYoung, Clifton Forbis, and James Morris; Lorin Maazel, in a historic return to the house, conducts. (Feb. 6 at 6:30.) ♦ The final performance will be led by Donald Runnicles, a fine Wagnerian himself; Simon O'Neill replaces Forbis in the role of Siegmund. (Feb. 9 at 12:30.) ♦ Bartlett Sher's winsome staging of **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia,"** which arrived during Peter Gelb's first season as general manager, is a modern classic, with sunny colors and a well-measured wit that will insure its continued presence in the repertory. The cool-toned Latvian mezzo-soprano Elina Garanča makes a charming début as Rosina, and Franco Vassallo wields a stunning baritone (in addition to barber's shears) as Figaro. With José Manuel Zapata, Maurizio Muraro, and the great veteran Ruggero Raimondi (as Don Basilio); Frédéric Chaslin conducts. (Feb. 7 at 8.) ♦ With Michael Schade replacing Zapata. (Feb. 14 at 8.) ♦ The Franco Zeffirelli production of **"Carmen"** is resolutely unimaginative, but its return has the considerable attraction of the mezzo-soprano Olga Borodina in the title role. Also with Marcelo Álvarez (Don José) and Lucio Gallo (Escamillo); Emmanuel Villaume. (Feb. 8, Feb. 13, Feb. 16, and Feb. 19 at 8.) ♦ The last time Karita Mattila sang the role of a flighty, fatally willful young girl at the Met—Salome, in 2004—she rocked the house to its foundations with a golden-age-worthy performance. Now she takes on another title role, that of Puccini's **"Manon Lescaut."** The production, originally staged by Gian Carlo Menotti in 1980, returns with Marcello Giordani and Dwayne Croft singing the roles of Des Grieux and Lescaut; James Levine is in the pit. (Feb. 9 at 8, Feb. 12 at 7:30, and Feb. 16 at 1.) ♦ The notoriously challenging title role in **"Otello,"** which Plácido Domingo owned for more than a decade, has been taken up recently at the Met by Vladimir Galouzine (with mixed results) and Ben Heppner (with melting lyricism). Johan Botha, the sturdy South African tenor, is the next to take it up, with the florid Renée Fleming as Desdemona and the reliable Carlo Guelfi as Iago; Semyon Bychkov. (Feb. 11, Feb. 15, and Feb. 18 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

JOHN RITTER

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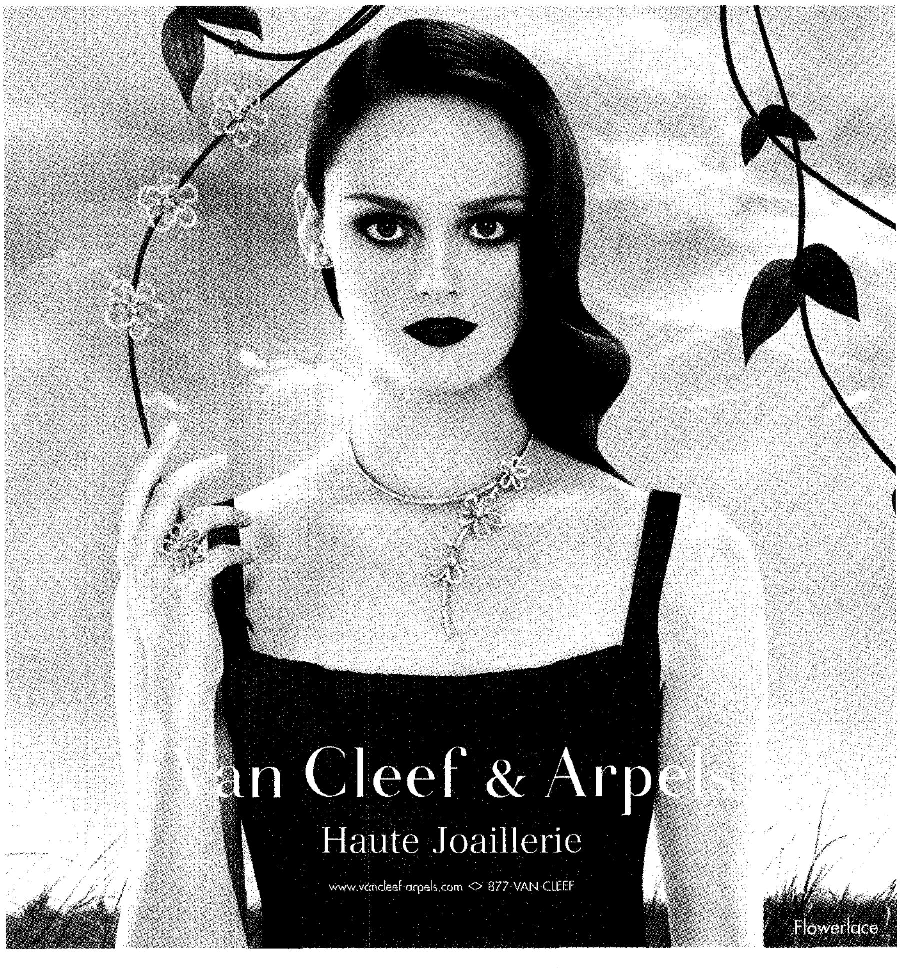

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

ENSEMBLE MATHEUS
An appealing and energetic period-performance group from France comes to Zankel Hall, backing the persuasive mezzo-soprano Jennifer Larmore in arias by Handel, Vivaldi, and Gluck. (212-247-7800. Feb. 7 at 7:30.)

NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Leonard Slatkin leads his Beltway band in Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," Liszt's rarely heard Piano Concerto No. 2 (with Jean-Yves Thibaudet), and "Liquid Interface," by the young composer Mason Bates. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 7 at 8.)

AMSTERDAM SINFONIETTA
The fine Dutch ensemble (with an esteemed guest, the violist Kim Kashkashian), comes to Gotham to perform works by Dvořák (the Serenade for Strings), Britten, and Betty Olivero (a première). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd Street. 212-415-5500. Feb. 7 at 8.)

MILLER THEATRE: NEW YORK COLLEGIUM
Left in financial limbo last season, the resurgent period-performance group (conducted by Andrew Parrott) shows up at George Steel's Columbia University redoubt to offer "Bach's Music Theatre," a concert featuring two "dramas for music" (BWV 205 and 207) sung by Marc Molomot and Thomas Meglioranza; the Concerto in A Minor for Flute, Violin, and Harpsichord rounds out the evening. (Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Feb. 7 at 8.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA
In "Culture Shock," the orchestra offers music on the fulcrum of the Western and Eastern musical traditions by Uri Caine, Terry Riley ("Remember This O Mind"), Evan Chambers, and Michael Tenzer ("Resolution/Tabuh Gari"); David Alan Miller, a sure hand on the tiller in new music, conducts. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 8 at 7:30.)

BUDAPEST FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA
Iván Fischer and his Hungarian ensemble, perhaps the finest in Eastern Europe, offer some music they know well. Feb. 8 at 8: Two sumptuous works by Rachmaninoff—the "Vocalise" and the "Paganini Rhapsody" (with the pianist Alexander Toradze)—precede Bartók's ballet score "The Wooden Prince." ♦ Feb. 10 at 3: The mezzo-soprano Ildikó Komlósi and the bass László Polgár sing in a concert version of Bartók's opera, "Bluebeard's Castle," a performance preceded by two works by Strauss (including "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500.)

BALTIMORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Marin Alsop, in her first New York appearance as the ensemble's music director, brings the orchestra to Carnegie Hall to perform works by Strauss, Debussy ("Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune"), Stravinsky (the 1919 "Firebird" Suite), and Steven Mackey ("Time Release," with the percussionist Colin Currie). (212-247-7800. Feb. 9 at 8.)

CURTIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Alan Gilbert, an alumnus of the distinguished Philadelphia conservatory (and the next music director of the New York Philharmonic) leads the superb student ensemble in Mahler's arrangement of Beethoven's Quartet in F Minor ("Serioso"), Nielsen's "Sinfonia Espansiva," and the "School for Scandal" Overture, by another favorite son, Samuel Barber. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 12 at 8.)

CHOIR OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA
Alfred Schnittke's grand and eloquent "Concerto for Choir" (a sacred work) is the highlight of a concert, conducted by Kent Tritle, that also includes a-cappella music by Ginastera and Striggio. (Park Ave. at 84th St. 212-288-2520. Feb. 13 at 8.)

ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
David Robertson, the orchestra's fearless music director, boldly blends modern marvels with repertory favorites. Feb. 15 at 8: Messiaen's "Turangalîla Symphony" is at once a towering intellectual achievement and a wildly sensual tribute to the power of love. Robertson conducts it in a "discovery concert," in which the performance is preceded by a multimedia presentation outlining the work's fascinating genesis. ♦ Feb. 16 at 8: In what amounts to a "conservative" program for Robertson, he leads his group in Brahms's "Tragic Overture," Sibelius's "Tapiola," Berg's Violin Concerto (with the compelling Christian Tetzlaff), and the New York première of John Adams's "Doctor Atomic" Symphony, based on music from his opera of the same name. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC CHAMBER SINFONIA
The conservatory's attractive programs often mix able student players with guest artists of considerable wattage. One of this week's events at Zankel Hall features the violinist Viviane Hagner and the violinist, violist, and conductor Pinchas Zukerman in a special concert that includes Mozart's "Linz" Symphony along with two concertos—Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major and Vivaldi's Concerto in B Minor for Four Violins. (212-247-7800. Feb. 16 at 7:30.)

Lee Friedlander's photograph "Franklin Park, Boston," at the Met.

MET ORCHESTRA
Many of James Levine's orchestral concerts are dedicated to the glories of the Viennese tradition. This one, as formidable as ever, combines Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor and the Final Scene from Strauss's "Salome" with *Orchesterstücke* by Webern and Berg. The soprano Deborah Voigt and the pianist Alfred Brendel are the eminent soloists. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 17 at 3.)

RECITALS

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG
In one of the pianist (and artistic director) Steven Blier's non-classical jaunts, the festival's singers are joined by Blier and the renowned jazz bassist Vince Giordano for a program of songs by Arlen, Carmichael, and Warren. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 5 and Feb. 7 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
Feb. 6 and Feb. 8 at 8: The Vertigo Quartet, part of the barge's pool of excellent young players, performs two seldom heard quartets in A minor: by Schubert (No. 13, "Rosamunde") and Walton (the Quartet No. 2), along with music by Mendelssohn. ♦ Feb. 15-16 at 8 and Feb. 17 at 4: The adventurous young string quartet Brooklyn Rider—along with two friends, the violist Max Mandel and the cellist Edward Arron—joins the soprano Nancy Allen Lundy to offer the world première of Russell Platt's String Sextet with Voice, one of several pieces this season commissioned in league with the New York State Music Fund. Sextets by Strauss (from "Capriccio") and Brahms (No. 2 in G Major) bookend the program. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Feb. 8 at 7: The dashing young Trio Capuçon—featuring the violinist Renaud Capuçon and his cellist brother, Gautier, along with the American pianist Nicholas Angelich—perform the three piano trios by Johannes Brahms. ♦ Feb. 9 at 8: The conductor and pianist André Previn accompanies a rising star of the violin, Joan Kwuon, in sonatas by Brahms, Prokofiev (the dulcet Sonata No. 2 in D Major), and Beethoven. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

TRIO CON BRIO COPENHAGEN
The bright young Danish group—winners of the 2005 Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson International Trio Award—offers piano trios by Brahms (No. 1 in B Major) and Ravel along with a new work by Bent Sørensen ("Phantasmagoria") at Weill Recital Hall. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 8 at 7:30.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "AMERICAN VOICES 1750-2008"
This year's Winter Festival is a celebration of a surprisingly heterogeneous group of American composers. Feb. 8 at 7:30: The Quartet No. 2 for Three Violins and Cello, by—that's right—Benjamin Franklin (more interested, apparently, in electricity than in the viola), leads off a ruggedly eccentric program of works by Cowell (the frighteningly difficult "Quartet Euphometric"), Gruenberg, and Antheil. Amy Beach's soothingly Romantic Piano Quintet (with the Escher String Quartet) calms the waters. ♦ Feb. 10 at 5: The world première of Mario Davidovsky's Piano Septet graces a concert also featuring works by Cage, Copland, Griffes, MacDowell, and Lukas Foss (the iconic "Time Cycle"). ♦ Feb. 12 at 7:30: Classic string quartets by Gershwin, Barber, and Ruth Crawford (along with Bernstein's Clarinet Sonata) precede the world première of a work by Joan Tower ("A Gift"). (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 212-875-5788.)

TOKYO STRING QUARTET
The distinguished ensemble, in the midst of a series at the 92nd Street Y, performs quartets by Haydn, Toshio Hosokawa ("Blossoming"), and Brahms. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 9 at 8.)

MANHATTAN SINFONIETTA
Jeffrey Milarsky's crack new-music band offers two surveys of visionary American composers. Feb. 9 at 8: In "The World of James Tenney," music by the fascinating late experimentalist is surrounded by works by Henry Cowell and Larry Polansky. ♦ Feb. 10 at 8: "The World of Milton Babbitt" combines music by the genial serialist master with works by Schoenberg and Jonathan Dawe (a première). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HOUSIN' THE JOINT

Late in the summer of 1973, a Bronx teen-ager named Cindy Campbell decided she needed extra money for clothes and school supplies. She and her brother Clive threw a party in the recreation room of their building, at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, an affordable-housing complex in the West Bronx. Invitations were written on index cards, with the name of a favorite song (the Ohio Players' "Skin Tight," for instance) next to the time and location of the party. Girls could enter for a quarter; guys, twice that. Clive played records under his graffiti name, Kool Herc, while a friend, who was known as Coke La Rock, exhorted party guests to dance. Thirty-five years and one genre later, Herc has enlisted Senator Charles Schumer to help the current residents of 1520 Sedgwick buy the building from developers and maintain it as affordable housing. "Someone is going to spend fifteen million dollars to put that waterfall under the Brooklyn Bridge, just so it will be visible throughout New York City," he said. "Affordable housing should be visible throughout New York City." That sort of rhymes.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

BANG ON A CAN ALL-STARS
In its annual "People's Commissioning Fund Concert," the All-Stars offer the world premières of works by Tristan Perich, Ken Thomson, and Erdem Helvacioglu, along with a special guest appearance by the avant-garde folksinger and violinist Iva Bittová. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Feb. 13 at 8.)

MIDORI
The violinist, adding some range to her repertory, teams up with some exciting collaborators—the pianist Marc-André Hamelin and the Miró Quartet—to perform two benchmark pieces by her countryman Toru Takemitsu—"A Way a Lone" and "Between Tides"—along with masterworks by two of his great influences, Ravel (the Violin Sonata in G Major) and Debussy. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 13 at 8.)

JOSHUA BELL AND JEREMY DENK
The engaging American violinist and his superb recital partner offer another glamorously conservative program of works by Tartini (the "Devil's Trill" Sonata), Prokofiev (the fiery Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano), Dvořák, and Grieg. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 14 at 8.)

"MEREDITH MONK / MULTI-MUSICS"
The trailblazing composer and performance artist is the linchpin of four concerts in the coming weeks that celebrate her music and her influence on other musicians. The first features Monk and her vocal ensemble offering a selection of her works. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Feb. 15 at 8.)

"THE MOVADO HOUR": CASALS QUARTET
The stylish series at the Baryshnikov Arts Center (drinks are served) hosts the Barcelona-based ensemble in performances of Kurtág's "Microludes" and the third of Beethoven's "Razumovsky" Quartets (in C Major). (450 W. 37th St. Feb. 19 at 7. For free tickets, which are required, call 917-934-4966.)

MOVIES OPENING

BAB'AZIZ
A parable, directed by Nacer Khemir, about a blind dervish who travels through the desert with his granddaughter. In Arabic. Opening Feb. 8. (Cinema Village.)

THE BAND'S VISIT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 8. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

DEFINITELY, MAYBE
Adam Brooks wrote and directed this comedy about a soon to be divorced father who tries to explain his life to his young daughter. Starring Ryan Reynolds and Abigail Breslin. Opening Feb. 14. (In wide release.)

DIARY OF THE DEAD
A horror film by George A. Romero, about students who, while making a horror film, discover real zombies. Opening Feb. 15. (In wide release.)

EZRA
A drama about a boy who is kidnapped and pressed into service as a child soldier in Sierra Leone. Directed by Newton Aduaka. Opening Feb. 13. (Film Forum.)

FOOL'S GOLD
A comedy about a troubled couple (Matthew McConaughey and Kate Hudson) who go in search of buried treasure. Directed by Andy Tennant. Opening Feb. 8. (In wide release.)

THE HOTTIE AND THE NOTTIE
In this comedy, a young man (Joel David Moore) in love with a beautiful woman (Paris Hilton) tries to find a date for her unattractive best friend (Christine Lakin). Directed by Tom Putnam. Opening Feb. 8. (In wide release.)

HOW TO ROB A BANK
A thriller, starring Nick Stahl, about a calamitous heist. Directed by Andrews Jenkins. Opening Feb. 6. (IFC Center.)

IN BRUGES
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 8. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

JUMPER
A science-fiction drama about a man who is genetically wired for teleportation. Starring Hayden Christensen and Samuel L. Jackson; directed by Doug Liman. Opening Feb. 14. (In wide release.)

LONDON TO BRIGHTON
Paul Andrew Williams directed this crime drama, about a prostitute and a runaway who flee a pimp. Opening Feb. 8. (Cinema Village.)

THE SPIDERWICK CHRONICLES
A fantasy about a haunted house that lures its residents into a fantasyland. Directed by Mark Waters; starring Freddie Highmore and Seth Rogen. Opening Feb. 15. (In wide release.)

STEP UP 2 THE STREETS
A dance-and-romance sequel, about two high-school students from different worlds. Directed by Jon Chu; starring Robert Hoffman and Briana Evigan. Opening Feb. 14. (In wide release.)

VINCE VAUGHN'S WILD WEST COMEDY SHOW
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Feb. 8. (In wide release.)

A WALK TO BEAUTIFUL
Mary Olive Smith directed this documentary, about five Ethiopian women who attempt to cope with the horrific effects of childbirth-related fistulas. In English, Amharic, and Oromiffa. Opening Feb. 8. (Quad Cinema.)

WELCOME HOME ROSCOE JENKINS
A comedy about a talk-show host who returns to his family home in the South. Starring Martin Lawrence and Mike Epps; directed by Malcolm D. Lee. Opening Feb. 8. (In wide release.)

THE YEAR MY PARENTS WENT ON VACATION
In this comic drama, set in Brazil in 1970, a boy is left in the care of his grandfather when his politically militant parents go into hiding. Directed by Cao Hamburger. In Portuguese. Opening Feb. 15. (Village East Cinemas.)

NOW PLAYING

CASSANDRA'S DREAM
In Woody Allen's fretful new movie—his third to be set in London—the bright-eyed Ian (Ewan McGregor), a young man working in his father's restaurant, falls in love with a beautiful young actress (Hayley Atwell) and tries to pass himself off as a wealthy investor in order to hold on to her. His brother, Terry (Colin Farrell), drinks too much and indulges a serious gambling habit. Both men are dream-addled and desperate, and when their wealthy uncle (Tom Wilkinson) offers to pay them to murder a man they fall into disaster. The movie doesn't have the galvanic drive of Sidney Lumet's recent "Before the Devil Knows You're Dead," which has a similar story; it's chatty and overexplicit, though there are many fine moments—including the nerve-racking murder itself, with its many preliminary steps and sickening conclusion. Farrell, in the best performance of his life, gives the weak-willed Terry a piteous self-loathing that's very touching.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/21/08.) (In wide release.)

CLOVERFIELD
Think "Godzilla" with A.D.D. Matt Reeves's frantic début, co-produced by J. J. Abrams, starts at a social gathering in New York and ends in devastation, thanks to the arrival of a khaki-colored beast the size of Lincoln Center. The movie's big selling point—and, as it happens, the reason it lurches close to the unwatchable—is that we observe the mayhem exclusively through the lens of a camcorder held by Hud (T. J. Miller) as he and three companions (Michael Stahl-David, Jessica Lucas, and Lizzy Caplan) stagger through the city, trying to save a damsel in distress. Given that the rescuers voluntarily walk through subway tunnels in the dark, in open defiance of every monster-movie convention, you can't help feeling that they deserve every giant poisonous spider that comes their way. Blitzed by the chaos, you may not notice just how much

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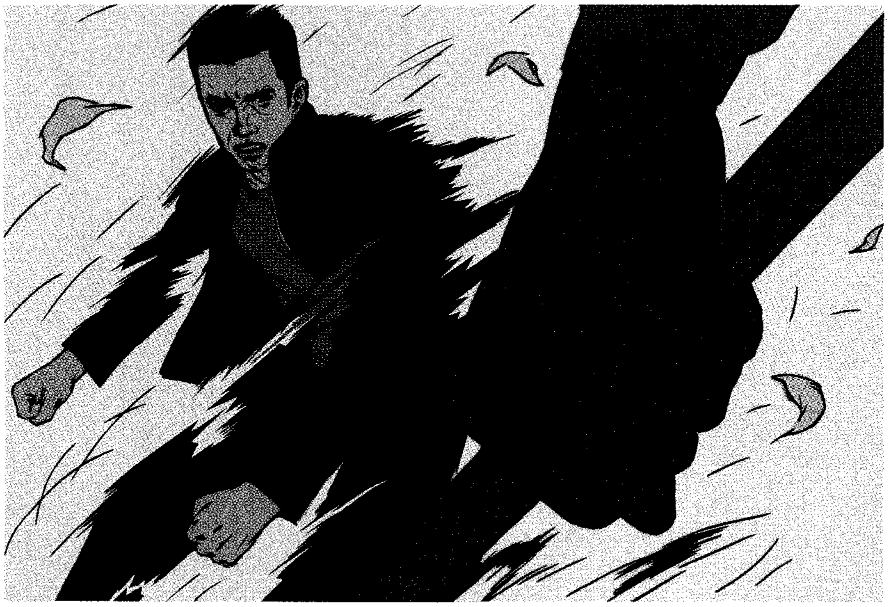
the movie cheats: Hud, for instance, appears to be editing as he goes, and his camera possesses magical powers of endurance. The headlong visuals may have a certain novelty and zip, but the rest of the project—the vacant motivation, the dialogue, the weakness for grinding coincidence—is nothing new.—*Anthony Lane* (1/28/08) (In wide release.)

DERSU UZALA

Akira Kurosawa's Siberian nature epic, about a Russian military explorer's friendship with Dersu, an Asian hunter, at the turn of the last century, signalled a new style for the sensei and presaged the lion-in-winter glories of Kurosawa's Shakespearean "Ran." From the cascade of gold-and-russet forest hues to the spare power of the staging, the film brings conviction to the bond between a sensitive, intelligent urbanite and a rural loner fuelled by pantheistic fervor. Kurosawa's monumental sort of dynamism—he plots out the action to the farthest corners of the 70-mm. screen—superbly expresses his view of man's eroding relationship to nature. Dersu's desire to see every element of the wilderness as a living thing was deemed sentimental when the film was first released, in 1975. Now it seems prescient: Dersu raises ecology to the level of religion and practical philosophy. In Russian.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade; Feb. 10 and Feb. 12.)



"Jumper," directed by Doug Liman and starring Hayden Christensen, opens Feb. 14.

4 MONTHS, 3 WEEKS AND 2 DAYS

There may be filmgoers who still harbor a footling prejudice against tales of Romanian abortion; in which case, here is the way to trounce them. Cristian Mungiu's forbidding drama, the winner of the Palme d'Or at last year's Cannes Film Festival, is set in Bucharest in 1987. Anamaria Marinca stars as Otilia, a young student trying to help a friend and finding herself thwarted, at every turn, by a jaded and hostile world. Her roommate, the hapless Gabita (Laura Vasiliu), wants to be rid of the baby she is carrying; abortion, however, is illegal, and thus, like almost everything in the city, is subject to the vagaries (and the perils) of the black market. So much about this story could have grown gruesome and sensational; instead, even the central deed—performed by the foul-hearted Mr. Bebe (Vlad Ivanov)—is filmed with unerring control. As for Marinca, she draws us ever nearer with her balance of composure and exasperation; how come the Academy took no notice of this actress? In truth, what Mungiu has made is not an abortion picture; it is a study of a system too exhausted to handle love and death. In Romanian.—*A.L.* (1/28/08) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HOW SHE MOVE

A dramatically rudimentary, cheaply made, but exciting dance musical from Canada. The heroine, Raya Green (Rutina Wesley), is a smart, intellectually ambitious girl of Jamaican descent who returns to her Toronto public school after three years at a boarding school where she was the only nonwhite student. She needs money to go to college, so, against her mother's wishes, she crashes an all-boy step group that's competing for a cash prize. Like "The Jazz Singer" and many subsequent movies, "How She Move" is an inspirational coming-of-age story. Step dancing is muscular and volatile, and the young women and men in the film are in amazing shape and can do anything they want with their bodies; Wesley, leaping on top of cars and smashing their windshields, brings the same strength to step that the men do. The director, Ian Iqbal Rashid, keeps the cameras out in front of the performers (the groups are small—usually six dancers), and, since he doesn't cut too much, the identities of the different groups—signalled by canes, umbrellas, or Fancy Dan white suits—come through as an aesthetic form of power. Written by Annmarie Morais. Choreographed by Hi-Hat.—*D.D.* (2/4/08) (In wide release.)

THE MOON ALSO RISES

Radical retro from 2005, like a Taiwanese "Far from Heaven." Lin Cheng-sheng's modernist spin on old-school melodrama, set in the mid-sixties, tells the story of a village schoolteacher, Xi-lian, who plans to marry her cousin Jun-ming but must first overcome her mother's opposition. Though her hopes are cruelly dashed, new ones are awakened by her sensitive, literary colleague, Chu. Lin's characters, in his subtly tangled and quietly tormented view, are crushed by the weight of oppressive tradition and political history: Xi-lian was born in wartime Tokyo under mysterious circumstances; her father, a dissident, is a political prisoner of Chiang Kai-shek (whose praises are taught by rote in her school); and Chu escaped from mainland China and has not seen his mother or siblings for twenty years. In calm, contemplative images and cleverly constructed domestic scenes, Lin lays bare the wounds of warped relationships and reveals the painful traces of broken dreams. In Hokkien, Mandarin, and Japanese.—*Richard Brody* (Anthology Film Archives; Feb. 17.)

THE ORPHANAGE

A skillful and destabilizing début from the young Spanish director Juan Antonio Bayona, in collaboration with the screenwriter Sergio G. Sánchez and the producer Guillermo del Toro (whose own films, notably "The Devil's Backbone," are a looming influence here). A happy couple, Laura (Belén Rueda) and Carlos (Fernando Cayo), buy the old orphanage where Laura herself was raised, and plan to reopen it as a home for disabled children. They have a son of their own, who appears to befriend the long-gone inhabitants of the place, as if communing with ghosts. When he disappears, a professional medium (Geraldine Chaplin) is brought in to help with the search; the staging of her séance, under green night-vision light, is designed to stretch and snap the nerves of the hardiest viewer. The movie, however, is more than the sum of its shocks, ripening into a detailed study of childhood anxiety and the extremes of maternal love. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (1/14/08) (In wide release.)

PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG WOMAN AT THE END OF THE 1960S IN BRUSSELS

In Chantal Akerman's quasi-autobiographical coming-of-age drama, from 1993, Michelle (Circé) drops out of school, steals money from home, sleeps with a boy she picks up at the movies, and decides that he's really the man for her best friend, Danielle (Joëlle Marlier). The action, pointedly set in April, 1968, fuses the story of her intimate crises with the eternal conflict of smart young people with family, society, and their own conflicting impulses. Akerman's flowing images stick close to Michelle in her wanderings through town and capture her romantic adventures with a disarming bluntness. Audaciously filming in the streets with no attempt to conceal anachronistic artifacts and fashions, Akerman marks the contemporary world with the buried feelings of her own youth, as if to prove Faulkner's dictum, "The past is not dead. In fact, it's not even past." A scene at a dance, set to "La Bamba" and James Brown, searingly recalls the mingled ecstasies and bewilderments of youth, the sudden chill of loneliness in a crowd that is the curse and the pride of a sensitive, yearning soul. In French.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Feb. 6.)

THE SILENCE BEFORE BACH

The Spanish director Pere Portabella's new film brings Bach's music to life with a mysterious, magnificent blend of drama, documentary, and quasi-surrealist whimsy. Beginning with a scene of a player piano rattling off the Goldberg Variations while rolling through a bright, bare loft, Portabella tickles the senses with a series of skits: a truck driver who plays Bach on the harmonica; Bach himself (the harpsichordist/organist Christian Brembeck) teaching his son Christoph Friedrich music via the "Well-Tempered Clavier"; a Bach impersonator hosting tourists in Leipzig; an orchestra of cellists playing a suite while speeding along in a sleek new subway car; a boat trip through Dresden, where the Goldberg Variations were commissioned, as a guide recounts the 1945 firebombing; a bookseller who speaks to a customer of the horrific abuses of great music in Auschwitz; and Felix Mendelssohn (Daniel Ligorio) discovering the "St. Matthew Passion" on a piece of sheet music in which his butcher has wrapped meat. From puckish humor and borderline kitsch, a great and serious notion emerges: modern Europe was built on the foundation of classical music, which, as a result, endures tenaciously there. In Spanish and German.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

STILL LIFE

A metaphysical ghost-town movie from the Chinese film poet Jia Zhang-ke. The enormous Three Gorges hydroelectric project, damming the Yangtze River, has flooded some of the towns and cities upstream, including Fengjie, where abandoned buildings rot in the summer heat; the only people remaining are the elderly and groups of workmen slowly demolishing the remaining structures with hand tools. The movie chronicles the adventures of two outsiders looking for their mates, who have been working on the project, but the story is intermittent at best. Instead, the movie is a flawless realization of limbo, in which the past has died and the future has yet to arrive. Despite the desolation, it's a beautiful-looking piece of work. From the high banks, the river and the green mountains on both sides of it extend into the distance in majestic panoply; gray clouds hang over the scene like painted backdrops. Jia, working with the cinematographer Yu Wiklai, is incapable of an ugly or unresonant image: the air seems moist and palpable, and even the thick, rusted pipes of derelict factories appear to breathe. In Mandarin.—*D.D.* (1/21/08) (IFC Center.)

SUMMER PALACE

Fourteen years (from 1987 to 2001) in the life of Yu Hong (Hao Lei), a soulful girl who leaves the provinces, goes to university in Beijing, and carries on a

PATRICK LEGER

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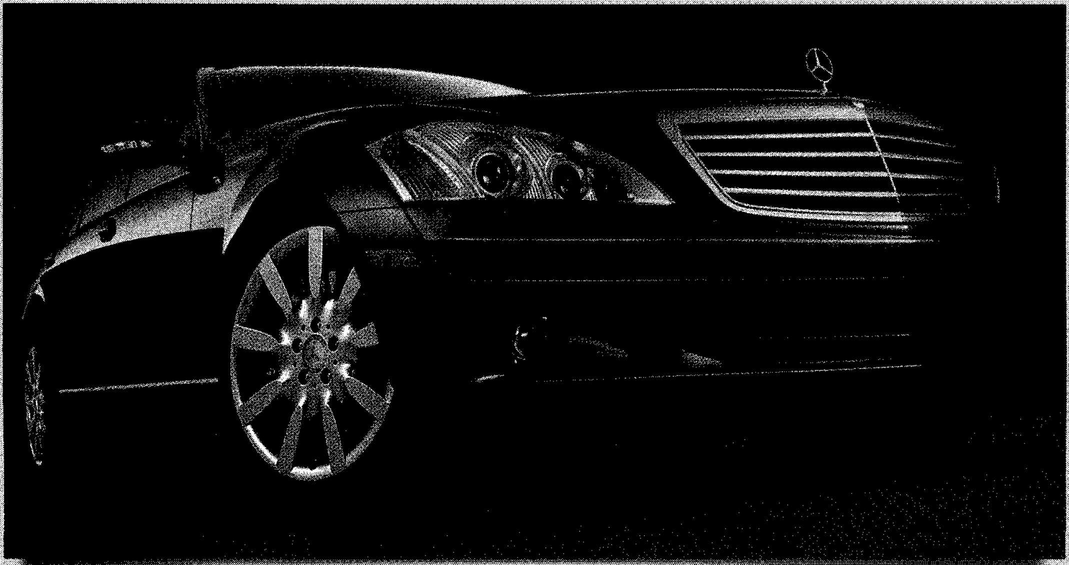

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MODEL CITIZENS

At the entrance to Irving Penn's show of portraits at the Morgan Library hangs a photograph of Jasper Johns taken in 2006 for this magazine. The artist, his shoulders hunched and head thrust forward, is more forbidding than welcoming;

he looks flinty, furious, and a little worried—a gargoyle on an eroding perch. If, at times, Penn seems to deflect emotion in his sitters, here he meets it head on. On the evidence of the rest of the nearly seventy portraits, all from the Morgan's collection, confrontations are not really Penn's style. From the beginning, in 1944, his portraiture has been formal, precise, and unfailingly elegant. If warmth and spontaneity are largely absent, they're rarely missed. Penn's subjects, including Truman Capote, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jean Cocteau, Colette, Francis Bacon, and John Updike, perform as the vivid characters we expect. Crowded together in a single room, they're a charming, eminently civilized bunch. But Johns, guarding the doorway, reminds us that they—like their photographer—could be tough.

—*Vince Aletti*

passionate affair with a handsome student, Zhou Wei (Guo Xiaodong), and many other men. The director, Lou Ye, uses jump cuts and a handheld camera, which, combined with Yu Hong's solemnly lyrical narration, make "Summer Palace" feel, at times, like a French New Wave film from 1967, but with much more explicit and frequent sex. The revelation, and great triumph, of Lou's work is that the scenes are not the least bit pornographic—that is, they're never separated from the most passionate emotion. Yu Hong and her friends change partners, but then the student idyll runs into the massacre at Tiananmen Square, in 1989, which Lou stages at the outskirts, as a furious confusion of rushing bodies. In the aftermath, the characters scatter to other cities in China, or go into exile in Berlin, where the love affairs lose their power—they become the last flings of a defeated generation. Needless to say, Lou has been banned from working in China, for five years. In Mandarin and German.—*D.D.* (1/21/08) (Cinema Village.)

TAXI TO THE DARK SIDE
Alex Gibney's excellent and agonizing documentary is a comprehensive examination of the Bush Administration's position on the use of torture in the wake of 9/11. Using photographs, reënactments, and interviews with soldiers, detainees, and Administration officials, Gibney lays bare the horrific details of treatment endured by prisoners in Bagram, Abu Ghraib, and Guantánamo Bay. The story of a provincial Afghan taxi driver, Dilawar, who died at the Bagram prison, frames the film; interviews with Dilawar's interrogators, a group of young, inexperienced U.S. soldiers, reveal a military system that lacks clearly defined interrogation guidelines and suggests that extreme treatment leads to confession. The result, Gibney shows, is pointless, inexcusable cruelty and the death of innocents. Gibney details the government's obfuscation of its tacit advocacy of torture, followed by its overt attempts to override the Constitution and give the President extraordinary wartime powers. In the process, Gibney implies that men who try to operate outside the law will inevitably lead others to do the same.—*Shauna Lyon* (Angelika Film Center.)

TEETH
Mitchell Lichtenstein, in his feature-film début, taps into the primal male fear of emasculation with a biting indie horror comedy based on the vagina-dentata myth. Innocent Dawn (the prodigiously coy Jess Weixler) is a star speaker at her local Christian "Promise" meetings, where she preaches to adolescents the importance of chastity. Although her mother is sick and her hateful brother, Brad (the utterly creepy John Hensley), terrorizes her with lewd taunting, Dawn remains cheerful, and when she falls for the adorable Tobey (Hale Appleman) her journey toward self-discovery begins—to her horror and to the detriment of many men, including, hilariously, a borderline-lecherous gynecologist. While Lichtenstein does not shy away from gory bloodletting, he maintains an even tone of parody, offering a fearsome nightmare for men and a droll, cathartic revenge scenario for women.—*S.L.* (Village East Cinemas.)

U2 3D
One of the world's greatest rock bands gets the full 3-D treatment in this fantastic concert film, directed by Catherine Owens and Mark Pellington. Filmed over the course of a week's worth of performances in Buenos Aires during the band's 2006 "Vertigo" tour, the movie features more than a dozen tunes, performed to perfection and infused with the overt, loving excitement of a band that lives for musical transcendence. Owens and Pellington's use of multiple cameras, particularly those placed among the adoring crowds, brings a joyous human element to the show, and the concert has been distilled to a heady eighty-five minutes that showcases some of the greatest work the band has ever done. It may be the best concert film since "Stop Making Sense." With Bono, Adam Clayton, Larry Mullen, Jr., and the extraordinary, compassionate guitar work of the Edge.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

VINCE VAUGHN'S WILD WEST COMEDY SHOW
This slight but sweet documentary follows a comedy tour that was the brainchild of the actor Vince Vaughn, revealing the bigheartedness not only of Vaughn but also of a group of struggling comedians. Vaughn chose four Comedy Store performers—Ahmed Ahmed, John Caparulo, Bret Ernst, and Sebastian Maniscalco—whose regular-guy acts proved to have an easy appeal to audiences in thirty U.S. cities, including Bakersfield (where Vaughn pays tribute to Buck Owen), Las Vegas, El Paso, Nashville, and South Bend. Vaughn supplemented each show with appearances from some of his friends, including Jon Favreau, Justin Long, and his "Wedding Crashers" co-star Keir O'Donnell; a moment of stage brilliance comes when Peter Billingsley ("A Christmas Story") and Vaughn reënact a scene from the movie where they first met, an after-school special about the dangers of steroids. The project's underlying sentimentality may verge on cliché, but it is nonetheless moving to watch the fumbling determination of four young men who are just trying to be good at something.—*S.L.* (In wide release.)

THE WITNESSES
The veteran French director André Téchiné has tried to capture the uneasy moment in Paris when the AIDS virus first hit the city. The year is 1984, and Manu (Johan Libéreau), who's from the South, and of North African descent, is a carefree young man living at the center of a sophisticated group of friends—a middle-aged gay doctor, Adrien (Michel Blanc), who makes Manu his protégé without demanding anything from him sexually; the doctor's friend, Sarah (Emmanuelle Béart), a rather narcissistic writer of children's books who is looking for a subject for grown-up fiction and finally finds one in the young man's life; her husband, Mehdi (Sami Bouajila), a detective on the Paris vice squad who becomes Manu's lover; and Manu's older sister, Julie (Julie Depardieu), an opera performer whose way with Mozart suggests a depth of feeling that the others don't have. "The Witnesses" is highly intelligent, but, despite some furious scenes of temper and bitterness, it has a largely placid bourgeois surface: The older characters all announce their feelings and their opinions of one another in perfectly formed, rapidly delivered sentences. They summarize their emotions rather than living them. Unconsciously, perhaps, Téchiné has produced a portrait of people who are determined to show that, whatever disaster may strike, nothing really gets to them. In French.—*D.D.* (2/4/08) (IFC Center.)

Also Playing

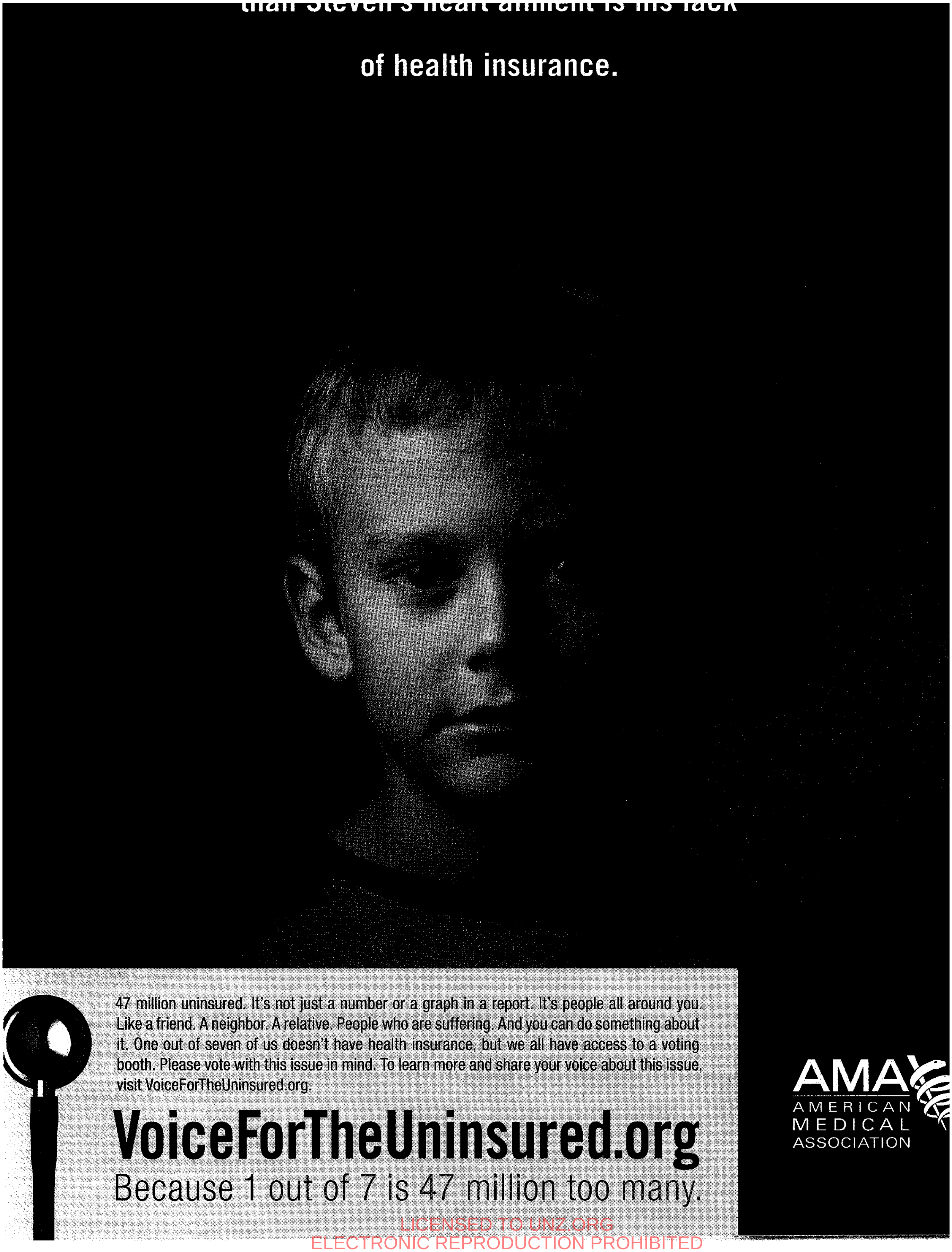
JUNO: In wide release (12/17/07). **LIVE AND BECOME:** Paris and Sunshine Cinema. **NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN:** In wide release (11/12/07). **UNTRACEABLE:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Olivier Assayas. Feb. 6 at 7: "Les Destinées Sentimentales" (2000; in French). ♦ Feb. 7 at 7, Feb. 8 at 9:30, and Feb. 10 at 9:15: "Cold Water" (1994; in French). ♦ Feb. 7 at 9 and Feb. 9 at 7: "Demonlover" (2002; in English and French). ♦ Feb. 8 at 7 and Feb. 10 at 7: "Clean" (2004; in English, French, and Cantonese). ♦ Feb. 9 at 4:30: "Late August, Early September" (1998; in French). ♦ Feb. 9 at 9:30: "Irma Vep" (1996; in English and French). ♦ Feb. 10 at 5: "Portrait of Hou Hsiao-Hsien" (1997; in English, French, and Mandarin). ♦ The films of Charles Burnett. Feb. 8 at 7:15, Feb. 10 at 4:30, and Feb. 14 at 7: "Killer of Sheep" (1977). ♦ Feb. 8 at 9:15, Feb. 10 at 6:30, and Feb. 13 at 9:15: "To Sleep with Anger" (1990). ♦ Feb. 9 at 4:30 and Feb. 12 at 9: "Warming by the Devil's Fire" (2003). ♦ Feb. 9 at 6, Feb. 11 at 9:15, and Feb. 13 at 7: "My Brother's Wedding" (1983). ♦ Feb. 9 at 8:30 and Feb. 11 at 7: "The Glass Shield" (1994). ♦ Feb. 10 at 8:30, Feb. 12 at 7, and Feb. 14 at 9: "Nat Turner: a Troublesome Property" (2003). ♦ Feb. 15 at 7:30 and 9:30 and Feb. 16-17 at 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Bless Their Little Hearts" (1984, Billy Woodberry). ♦ The films of Lin Cheng-sheng. Feb. 15 at 6:30 and Feb. 17 at 9: "A Drifting Life" (1996; in Mandarin). ♦ Feb. 15 at 9:15 and Feb. 18 at 7: "Murmur of Youth" (1997; in Mandarin). ♦ Feb. 16 at 4:30 and Feb. 18 at 9:15: "Sweet Degeneration" (1998; in

ANDY FRIEDMAN



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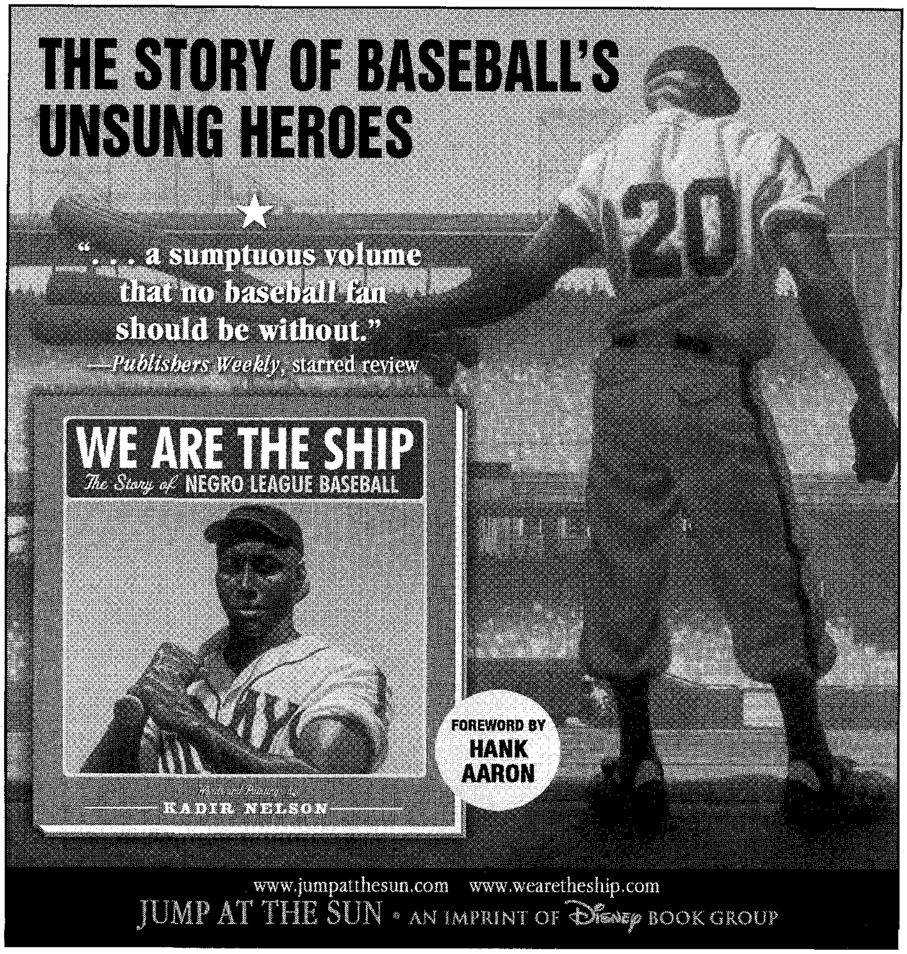
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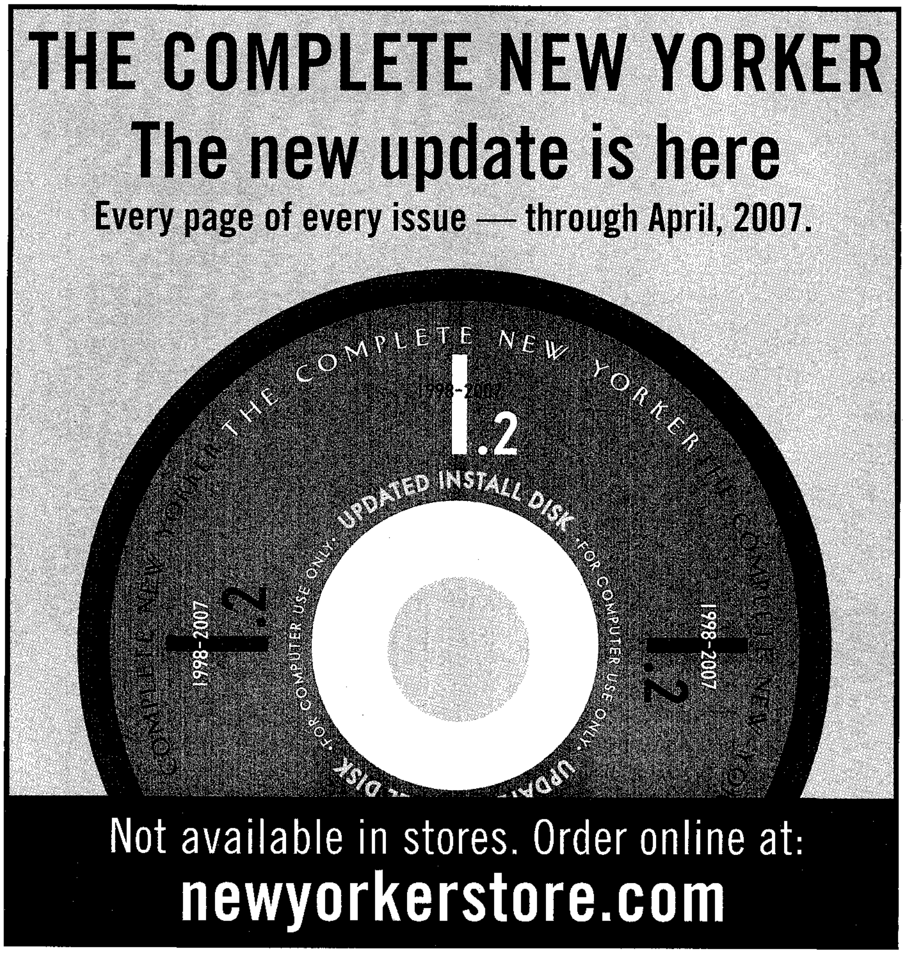
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Mandarin). ♦ Feb. 16 at 7 and Feb. 19 at 9:15: "March of Happiness" (1999; in Mandarin and Japanese). ♦ Feb. 16 at 9:15 and Feb. 19 at 7: "Betelnut Beauty" (2001; in Mandarin and Hokkien). ♦ Feb. 17 at 4:30: "Robinson's Crusoe" (2002; in Mandarin). ♦ Feb. 17 at 6:30: "The Moon Also Rises" (†).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—In revival. Feb. 15 and Feb. 17 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15; Feb. 16 at 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30; and Feb. 18-19 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Loves of a Blonde" (1965, Milos Forman; in Czech).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In première. Feb. 6-12 at 1, 3:15, 5:40, 7:50, and 10: "The Silence Before Bach" (†). ♦ In revival. Feb. 6-7 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:40: "Don't Look Back" (1967, D. A. Pennebaker). ♦ Through Feb. 28: The films of Sidney Lumet. Feb. 8-10 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9 and Feb. 11 at 2, 4:30, and 9:45: "Network" (1976). ♦ Feb. 11 at 7: A discussion with Lumet and the film historian Foster Hirsch. ♦ Feb. 12 at 2, 4:50, and 7:40: "The Group" (1966). ♦ Feb. 13 at 1, 5:30, and 10: "The Offence" (1973). ♦ Feb. 13 at 3:10 and 7:40: "The Hill" (1965). ♦ Feb. 14 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Verdict" (1982). ♦ Feb. 15-16 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "The Pawnbroker" (1965). ♦ Feb. 17-18 at 1:30, 5:25, and 9:20: "12 Angry Men" (1957). ♦ Feb. 17-18 at 3:20 and 7:15: "Fail-Safe" (1964). ♦ Feb. 19 at 1, 3:30, 6, and 8:30: "Murder on the Orient Express" (1974).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Feb. 26: "Rare Treasures of French Cinema." Feb. 12 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "End of Desire" (1958, Alexandre Astruc; in French). ♦ Feb. 19 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Immortal" (1963, Alain Robbe-Grillet; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—The films of Louis Malle. Feb. 8-10 at 11 A.M.: "Lacombe, Lucien" (1974; in French). ♦ Feb. 15-18 at 11 A.M.: "Atlantic City" (1980). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Feb. 15-17: "Fast Times at Ridgemont High" (1982, Amy Heckerling).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Feb. 6-8 at 1:30: "Reaching for the Moon" (1931, Edmund Goulding). ♦ Feb. 13-15 at 1:30: "Now I'll Tell" (1934, Edwin Burke). ♦ "The Age of Chevalier." Feb. 6 at 6: "Portrait of a Young Woman at the End of the 1960s in Brussels" (†) and "US Go Home" (1994, Claire Denis; in French). ♦ Feb. 6 at 8:30: "Beau Travail" (1999, Claire Denis; in French). ♦ Feb. 7 at 5:30: "The Southern Cross" (2003, Pablo Reyero; in Spanish). ♦ Feb. 8 at 5:45: "Que la Barque Se Brise, Que la Jonque S'Entrouvre" (2001, Rithy Panh; in French and Cambodian). ♦ Feb. 8 at 7:45 and Feb. 10 at 2: "Regular Lovers" (2005, Philippe Garrel; in French). ♦ Feb. 9 at 2: "Time and the Room" (1992, Patrice Chéreau; in French). ♦ Feb. 9 at 4: "La Vie de Marianne" (1997, Benoît Jacquot; in French). ♦ Feb. 9 at 6 and Feb. 13 at 8: "Les Terres Froides" (1999, Sébastien Lifshitz; in French) and "Le Petit Voleur" (1999, Erick Zonca; in French). ♦ Feb. 9 at 8:30 and Feb. 14 at 5: "Strong Shoulders" (2002, Ursula Meier; in French). ♦ Feb. 10 at 5:30: "Wild Reeds" (1994, André Téchiné; in French). ♦ Feb. 11 at 6: "El Medina" (1999, Yousry Nasrallah; in Arabic and French). ♦ Feb. 11 at 8:15 and Feb. 13 at 5:45: "Terra Incognita" (2002, Ghassan Salhab; in French, Arabic, and English). ♦ "Documentary Fortnight." Feb. 13 at 8:15: "To My Great Chagrin: The Unbelievable Story of Brother Theodore" (2007, Jeff Sumerel). ♦ Feb. 14 at 8: "Garbage Warrior" (2006, Oliver Hodge). ♦ Feb. 15 at 6: "Exposed" (2005, Heidrun Holzfeind) and "Teeth" (2007, Alice Arnold). Viewers have been asked to avoid wearing perfume or heavily scented lotions to the screening. ♦ Feb. 15 at 8: "Out of Bounds" (2005, Alexandre Leborgne; in Tagalog and French). ♦ Feb. 16 at 2: "Doctor" (2006, Mong-Hong Chung; in English, Mandarin, and Spanish). ♦ Feb. 16 at 7: "The Unforeseen" (2007, Laura Dunn). ♦ Feb. 16 at 8: "Match Made" (2006, Mirabelle Ang) and "Oh, Saigon" (2006, Doan Hoang). ♦ Feb. 17 at 2: "Out of Time" (2006, Harald Friedl; in German). ♦ Feb. 17 at 6: "The End of the

Neubacher Project" (2007, Marcus J. Carney; in German). ♦ The films of Milos Forman. Feb. 14 at 7: "Loves of a Blonde" (1965; in Czech), introduced by the director. ♦ Feb. 15 at 6: "Taking Off" (1971), introduced by the director. ♦ Feb. 15 at 8: "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" (1975), introduced by the director. ♦ Feb. 16 at 2: "The Firemen's Ball" (1967; in Czech). ♦ Feb. 16 at 3:30: "Valmont" (1989). ♦ Feb. 16 at 6: "A Well-Paid Walk/A Walk Worthwhile" (1966; in Czech). ♦ Feb. 17 at 2: "Goya's Ghosts" (2007; in Spanish). ♦ Feb. 18 at 2: "The Decathlon" (1973) and "Audition" (1963; in Czech). ♦ Feb. 18 at 4: "Hair" (1979). ♦ Feb. 18 at 6:30: "Amadeus" (1984). ♦ Feb. 19 at 6: "Black Peter" (1964; in Czech). ♦ Feb. 19 at 8: "Ragtime" (1981).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Films directed by John Ford at Twentieth Century Fox. Feb. 9 at 5: "Seas Beneath" (1931). ♦ Feb. 9 at 5: "Four Men and a Prayer" (1938). ♦ Feb. 10 at 5: "When Willie Comes Marching Home" (1950). ♦ Feb. 16 at 2:30: "Tobacco Road" (1941). ♦ Feb. 16-17 at 5: "My Darling Clementine" (1946). ♦ Feb. 17 at 2: "The Grapes of Wrath" (1940). ♦ In preview. Feb. 6 at 7: "Diary of the Dead" (2007, George A. Romero), followed by a discussion with the director.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." Feb. 8 at 9:30: "Don't Look Now" (1973, Nicolas Roeg), introduced by Frances Kiernan. ♦ Feb. 15 at 9:30: "Ichi the Killer/Koroshiya 1" (2001, Takashi Miike; in Japanese).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Feb. 8-9: "Gimme Shelter" (1970, Albert Maysles, David Maysles, and Charlotte Zwerin).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Writers in the Sun." Feb. 10 and Feb. 12 at 6: "The Big Knife" (1955, Robert Aldrich). ♦ Feb. 10 and Feb. 12 at 8: "Rear Window" (1954, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ Feb. 17 and Feb. 19 at 6: "The Thin Man" (1934, W. S. Van Dyke). ♦ Feb. 17 and Feb. 19 at 8: "Woman of the Year" (1942, George Stevens).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Envisioning Russia: A Century of Filmmaking." All films are in Russian. Feb. 8 at 1 and 6:15: "White Sun of the Desert" (1969, Vladimir Motyl). ♦ Feb. 9 at 2 and 6: "July Rain" (1966, Marlen Khutsiyev). ♦ Feb. 9 at 8:15 and Feb. 14 at 2:45: "Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears" (1980, Vladimir Menshov). ♦ Feb. 10 at 5:15 and Feb. 12 at 2 and 8:30: "Dersu Uzala" (†). ♦ Feb. 10 at 7:45 and Feb. 11 at 2 and 6:15: "Uncle Vanya" (1970, Andrei Konchalovsky). ♦ Feb. 11 at 4:15 and 8:20 and Feb. 14 at 1: "At Home Among Strangers, Stranger at Home" (1974, Nikita Mikhalkov). ♦ Feb. 13 at 2 and 6:30: "The Mirror" (1974, Andrei Tarkovsky). ♦ Feb. 13 at 4:15 and 8:45: "The Ascent" (1976, Larissa Shepitko). ♦ Special screenings. Feb. 6 at 6:30: "Two Laws" (1982, the Borroloola Aboriginal Community with Carolyn Strachan and Alessandro Cavadini), followed by a panel discussion with Strachan and others. ♦ Feb. 7 at 6:30: "From the Ground Up" (2007, Su Friedrich), followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ Through Feb. 28: "*Film Comment* Selects." Feb. 14 at 10:30: "Diary of the Dead" (2007, George S. Romero). ♦ Feb. 15 at 6: "The Duchess of Langeais" (2007, Jacques Rivette; in French), introduced by the actress Jeanne Balibar. ♦ Feb. 15 at 9:45: "Boarding Gate" (2007, Olivier Assayas). ♦ Feb. 16 at 5:30 and Feb. 18 at 4: "Wolfsbergen" (2007, Nanouk Leopold; in Dutch). ♦ Feb. 16 at 7:30: "Joy Division" (2007, Grant Gee). ♦ Feb. 16 at 10 and Feb. 19 at 3:30: "Ex Drummer" (2007, Koen Mortier). ♦ Feb. 17 at 1:30: "Import Export" (2007, Ulrich Seidl; in German). ♦ Feb. 17 at 4:15 and Feb. 18 at 1:30: "A Wonderful World" (2007, Luis Estrada; in Spanish). ♦ Feb. 17 at 6:45: "Before I Forget" (2007, Jacques Nolot; in French). ♦ Feb. 17 at 9 and Feb. 19 at 1:30: "Flash Point" (2007, Wilson Yip; in Cantonese). ♦ Feb. 18 at 6: "The Banishment" (2007, Andrei Zvyagintsev; in Russian). ♦ Feb. 18 at 9: "Chop Shop" (2007, Ramin Bahrani).

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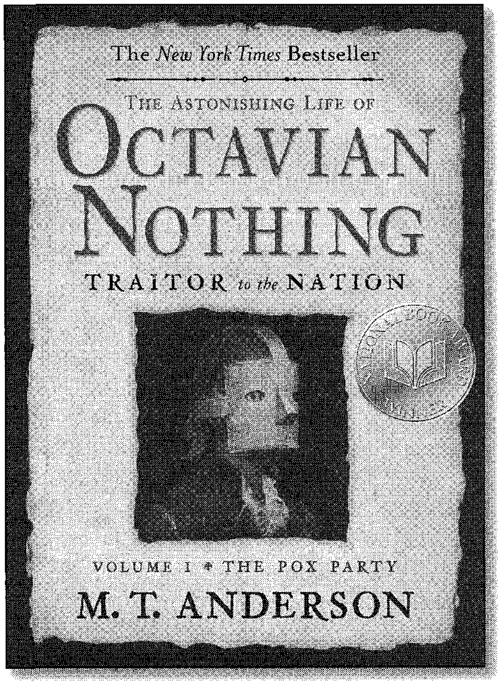

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READINGS AND TALKS

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The magician Bob Friedhoffer will perform some of the feats Harry Houdini made famous, and then he will talk with his fellow-magician George Schindler and the Houdini biographer Kenneth Silverman. (170 Central Park W., at 77th St. 212-868-4444. Feb. 7 at 6:30.)

STRAND BOOK STORE
Luc Sante reads from his new essay collection, "Kill All Your Darlings." (Broadway at 12th St. Feb. 7 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

ANNE CARSON
The poet presents "String Talks," a multimedia program in which she reads from her work, accompanied (somehow) by red string, Merce Cunningham dancers, and audiovisual elements. (Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, 566 LaGuardia Pl., at Washington Sq. S. For more information, call 212-998-8816. Feb. 8 at 7.)

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
The documentary filmmaker St. Clair Bourne, who died late last year, covered a variety of illustrious subjects, including Paul Robeson, Gordon Parks, and Langston Hughes, in his three-plus-decade career. On Feb. 10 at 2, a number of critics and scholars pay tribute to him. (35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria, Queens. 718-784-4520.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Following the première of Jeff Sumerel's documentary "To My Great Chagrin: The Unbelievable Story of Brother Theodore," Tom Schiller, Eric Bogosian, Dick Cavett, Lorca Morello, and other fans recall the late entertainer Theodore Gottlieb. (11 W. 53rd St. 212-708-9400. Feb. 13 at 8:15.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"HEARTBREAK HAVEN"
"The Rejection Show" is a series that makes gold from the dross of the city's cultural industry by offering comedians, writers, and the like the chance to present work that has been passed over by television shows, magazines, and other established outlets. "Mortified" is a stage show out of Los Angeles that plays adolescent diary entries, letters, and other awkward bits of ephemera for laughs. The two have hooked up to give those who aren't expecting roses a place to wait out Valentine's Day. (The Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 212-366-9176. Feb. 14 at 8.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The midseason (i.e., less expensive) Impressionist and modern-art sales are back in town, abounding in images of luscious nudes, gardens in full bloom, and boats floating serenely in safe harbors. **Sotheby's** offering (Feb. 13) includes two Renoirs—studies of a bather ("Baigneuse," just eight by six inches) and of a cluster of flowers ("Anémones")—as well as a painting of a stylish lady in a polka-dot dress ("Le Repos") by Jean-Pierre Cassigneul. On Valentine's Day, the house holds a big, splashy charity auction organized by Bono and Damien Hirst, "The (RED) Auction," a kind of "We Are the World" for the art set that benefits the United Nations foundations in support of H.I.V./AIDS programs in Africa. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** holds a two-day sale of prints and multiples (Feb. 7-8) with works ranging from Rembrandt to Ruscha, followed one week later by a midseason offering of Impressionist and modern art (Feb. 14). One of the lushest pieces in this sale is by the French-Catalonian neo-Impressionist Carlos Nadal, a sensualist of color; his "Grand Collection" depicts a wall of Impressionist paintings in a gallery, radiating the warm pleasures of bourgeois museum-going. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Doyle,** the city's most prominent niche auctioneer, welcomes the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show to town with its annual auction of dog art (Feb. 12), featuring such canine treasures as "Sleeping Pups" (by William Henry Hamilton Trood) as well as the original artwork for the dog-show poster "Westminster: There's Only One," by Malcolm Farley. The next day (Feb. 13) brings another house staple, a sale of fine and decorative arts from the Belle Époque, including Louis XV and Louis XVI revival furnishings and vases, desk accessories, and a Favrile glass lamp by Tiffany Studios. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.) ♦ Photographs and African-American art go on sale at **Swann** (Feb. 7 and Feb. 19) over two consecutive weeks. The first sale is built around an anonymous American collection, strong in nineteenth-century albums and portfolios featuring photographs of expeditions, exotic places, and the American Civil War; the second offers a wide-reaching survey of works by such artists as Aaron Douglas, Elizabeth Catlett, Hale Woodruff, and Charles White. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

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TOMER HANUKA

ON THE HORIZON

DANCE
BEAUTY IS GOODNESS
Feb. 21-24

Behind the kitschy title, "Diana Vishneva: Beauty in Motion," lies an enticing opportunity to see this exceptional dancer, at City Center. Vishneva, an inspired product of the legendary Vaganova Academy and a generous, emotionally turbulent performer at both the Kirov and the American Ballet Theatre, will appear in three works made for her, including Alexei Ratmansky's "Pierrot Lunaire." (212-581-1212.)

MOVIES
BEYOND AFRICA
Feb. 23-28

Documentaries come to the fore in BAM's selection of highlights from the African Diaspora Film Festival, including "Cuba, an African Odyssey," a report on the depth of Cuban involvement in African revolutionary movements; "Josephine Baker: Black Diva in a White Man's World," a portrait by Annette von Wangenheim; and "Black as Ink," about the postwar Paris sojourns of Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and other African-American writers. (718-636-4100.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
SEAFARER
Feb. 28-March 24

Anthony Dean Griffey, whose honeyed voice and crystalline diction could make him a perfect singer of Britten, takes on one of the composer's most complex characters—the title role in "Peter Grimes," which the Met is offering in a new production by John Doyle. (212-362-6000.)

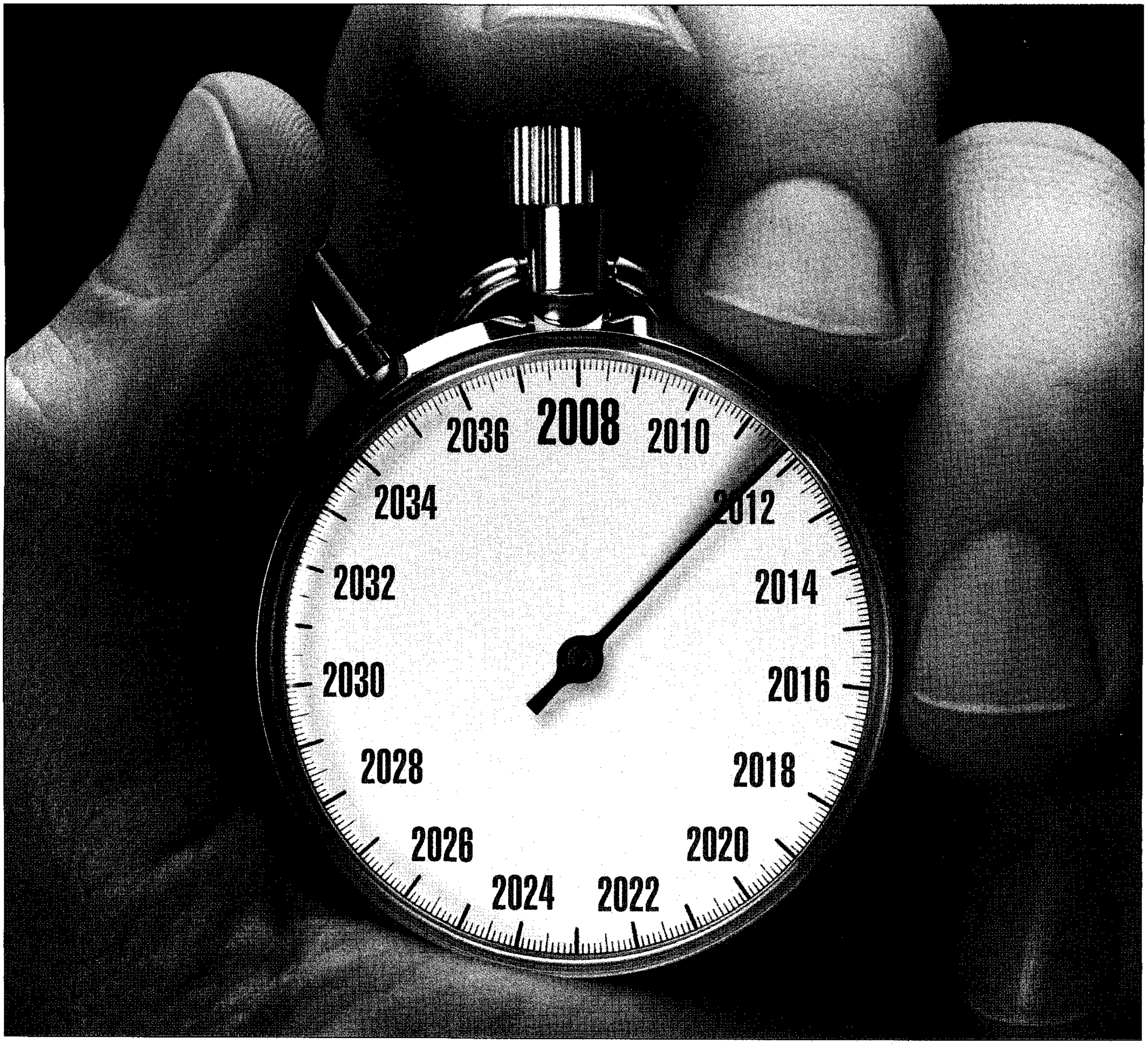
NIGHT LIFE
MODERN LOVE
March 4-5

The singer-songwriter Jonathan Richman, who can wring exuberant and idiosyncratic pathos out of nearly any subject, pays a visit to the Music Hall of Williamsburg. (718-486-5400.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
THROW DOWN
March 9

The New York Open Judo Championship, at the New York Athletic Club, is the last domestic tournament before the Olympic trials in Las Vegas this summer; it's expected to draw nearly two hundred athletes from around the globe. (www.judonyc.com.)

The New York Open Judo Championship.



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2008 Cultural Sampler

Peru has more than three thousand festivals a year, many blending religious holidays with ancient rituals. Sharing common cultural traditions, most events include live music and dance, colorful costumes, and gastronomic delicacies. Listed are some celebrations that draw visitors from all over the world.

Ica Wine Festival
Second week of March

Ica is at the heart of Peru's wine country, just inland from the Pacific coast. Visitors can sample *pisco*, Peru's famous grape brandy, or taste local sweets called *tejas*, made from nuts and dried fruits. Other activities include a parade, concerts, and an African-influenced dance known as the *festejo*.

Holy Week (Semana Santa)
March 16th–23rd

The week leading up to Easter is celebrated all over Peru, but some of the more spectacular ceremonies take place each year in Ayacucho. On the Friday before Palm Sunday (March 14th), crowds gather around effigies of Jesus and the Virgin Mary in front of the Magdalena Cathedral. There is then a reënactment of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Easter culminates with a procession that begins at dawn. Throughout the week, ceremonies and religious rites alternate with food and music festivals.

Peruvian Paso Horse Festival
Third and fourth weeks of April

The Peruvian Paso horse is known for its high step, proud neck, and smooth gait. Each year, a national competition is held for the breed near the pre-Incan ruins of Pachacámac, just south of Lima. Riders sport traditional outfits, wide-brimmed hats, and boots, showing off the intricate steps cited as one of the inspirations for the *marinera*, the national dance.

Feast of Alacitas and Las Cruces
May 3rd–4th

On the shore of Lake Titicaca, the world's highest navigable lake, Puno locals purchase handcrafted items symbolizing a variety of material desires. Folklore has it that the offering of the miniature token to a saint will result in the granting of the requested favor, or that the simple purchase of the miniature will lead to the manifestation of the real thing (be it a TV or a house) within the year. A miniature Ekeko, a mythological fortune-bearer character, is sure to speed things up.

Festival of the Sun (Inti Raymi)
June 24th

Cusco, near Machu Picchu, takes center stage during its annual Inti Raymi, a celebration of the Southern Hemisphere's winter solstice and the Inca sun god, Inti. Thousands of visitors participate in a procession to the Sacsayhuamán fortress for a reënactment of Incan rituals. Colorful costumes, elaborate dances, traditional food, and live music round out the event.

The Virgin of El Carmen
July 15th–16th

The Andean village of Paucartambo celebrates its patron saint of mixed-blood people, Mamacha Carmen, with a colorful procession of masked revelers, acrobatics, fireworks, music, and dancing. The celebration continues throughout the night, with many of the performances re-enacting cultural events and rituals. Ceremonies end at local cemeteries, where the dead are rewarded with a communal blessing.

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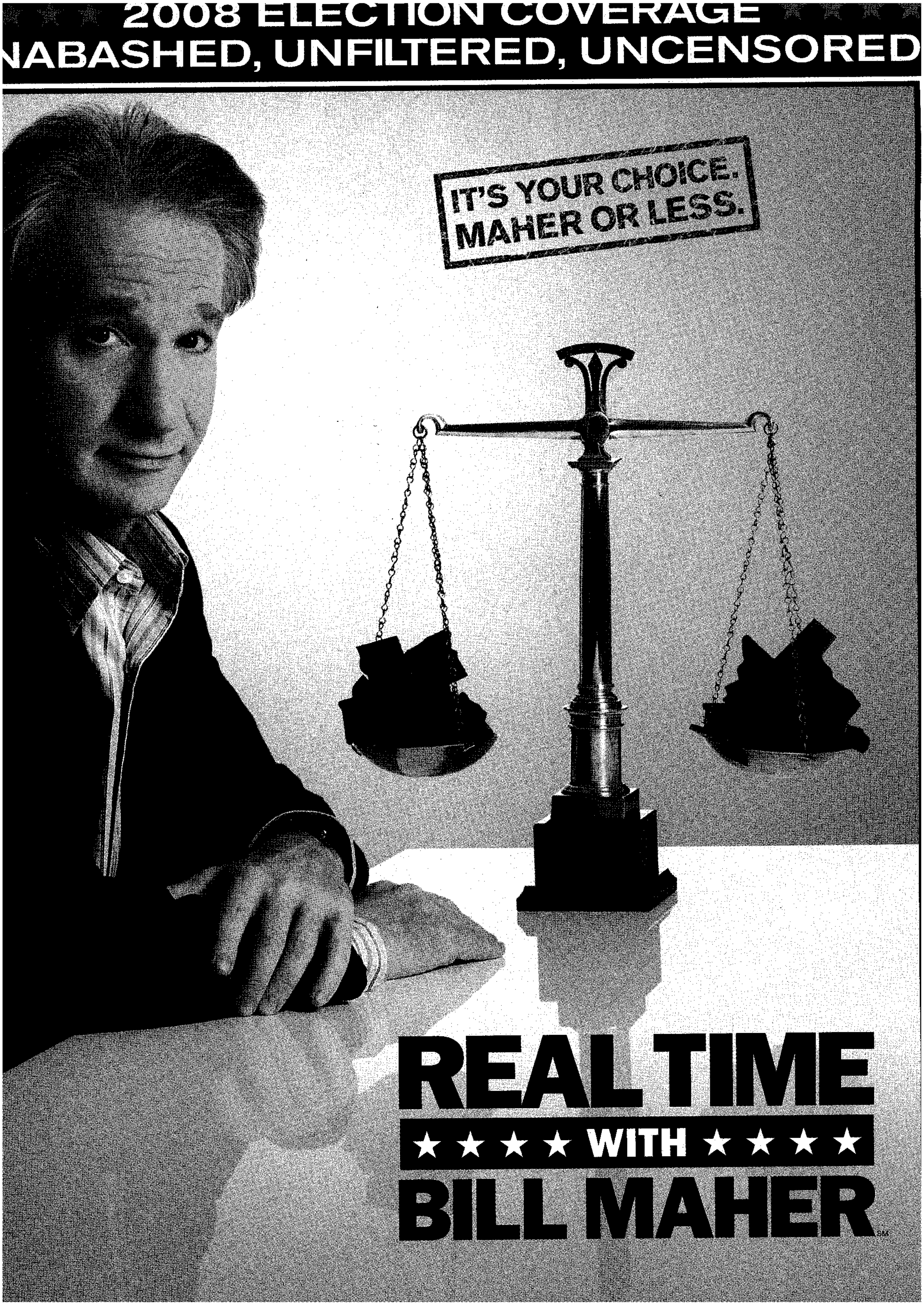
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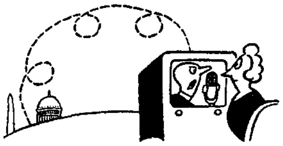
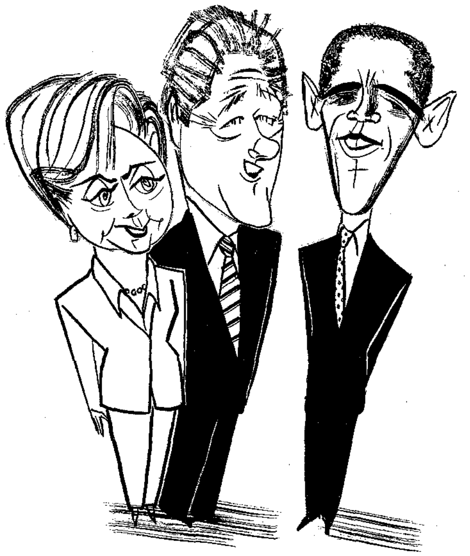


During the four or five weeks leading up to February 5th—"Tsunami Tuesday," when voters in states with half the nation's population participate in a not quite national primary—the emotional texture of the Democratic side of the Presidential campaign changed profoundly. For most of Year One of this insanely elongated process, the Democratic Party had been a peaceable kingdom. Its voters were proud of and pleased with the array of choices before them: proud of its diversity, pleased with its unity. A confident woman in middle age; a graceful young African-American of mixed parentage; a handsome Southerner from a white working-class family; and a Mexico City-raised, three-quarters Hispanic governor-diplomat with (for a touch of mayonnaise) a blandly "American" name—these were the Democrats' leading contenders, supplemented by a more conventional pair of distinguished senators from the East Coast. After years of talk about "looking like America," here was the real thing. On questions of policy, the views of the candidates were as reassuringly similar as their backgrounds were exhilaratingly different. Such disagreements as they had, none of them fundamental or bitter, were subsumed in their revulsion at the moral and strategic failures of the Bush Administration. As for Democratic voters, it was hard to find one who wouldn't tell you something like this: "I'm supporting so-and-so in the primary, but I'll be fine with any of them—just so we get a Democrat in the White House."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

But as Iowa gave way to New Hampshire and then South Carolina, and the contest careered toward its ultimate form of a zero-sum game between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, the mood darkened. Anger and depression, the pop-psych books tell us, are two sides of the same coin: depression is anger suppressed, anger is depression liberated. Is it possible to strobe between the two? It must be, because, as the Clinton-Obama race turned nasty, a rapid alternation was noticeable among the sort of obsessive Democrats who follow every twist and turn. This was true of people all across the deep-blue universe: passionate Obama supporters; tentative Obama supporters; Obama-Clinton fence-sitters (including the fans of John Edwards, now bereft); and tentative Clinton supporters. (Passionate Clinton supporters, notwithstanding their candidate's shrinking but still sizable lead in national polls, seem to be a little rarer.)



The anger was mostly directed at Senator Clinton, her husband, and her campaign, for a series of what have come to be known, redundantly, as "negative attacks." The most egregious, because so coldly premeditated, was a radio spot that took as its hook a snippet of audio from an Obama interview in which he said, "The Republicans were the party of ideas for a pretty long chunk of time there over the last ten, fifteen years." A smooth-voiced announcer then adds:

> Really? Aren't those the ideas that got us into the economic mess we're in today? Ideas like special tax breaks for Wall Street? Running up a nine-trillion-dollar debt? Refusing to raise the minimum wage or deal with the housing crisis? Are those the ideas Barack Obama's talking about?

Uh, no. Those are *not* the ideas Barack Obama's talking about. But the spot's disingenuous questions were plainly intended to deceive the unwary into assuming that Wall Street tax breaks and the like are the very ideas Obama has been advocating. With equal honesty, the spot could have said, "Denying global warming? Torturing prisoners? Appointing right-wing ideologues to the federal courts? Are those the ideas Barack Obama's talking about?" But that might have taxed the credulity of even the unwary.

Actually, Obama was not talking about any particular ideas. He was talking about the conservative movement's success in *marketing* its policy ideas and presenting itself as an intellectual powerhouse. He can be faulted for getting the timeline wrong in a way that dismissed the Clinton years—the Republicans' "party of ideas" claim is at least thirty years old—but his basic point has long been a commonplace among Democrats. It is why liberals have spent the past decade and more trying to build a counterweight to the conservative infrastructure of think tanks and policy journals.

Obama has turned out to have a kind of political magic unseen since the Kennedy brothers of the nineteen-sixties. He has something of Jack's futuristic, ironic cool, something of Bobby's earnest, inspiring heat. His endorsement, last week, by President Kennedy's surviving brother and surviving child closed the circuit. Senator Clinton's answer to this is "I have more experience." And it's true. Her mastery of policy is deep and subtle; her sense of how the White House wields power is probably unequalled. But experience is a problematic argument, especially when voters are hungry for a new beginning.

Anyway, an argument is no match for an aura. So the Clinton campaign evidently concluded that it had no choice but to "go negative," and Bill Clinton was assigned, or assigned himself, the task. Some of his attempts to sully his wife's opponent—calling Obama's consistent opposition to the Iraq war "the biggest fairy tale I've ever seen" and dismissing his South Carolina victory as a racial one, like Jesse Jackson's twenty years ago—have been untruthful or unworthy or both. Whether or not these and similar attacks "worked" (the evidence is mixed), they certainly succeeded in diminishing both the former President and his wife. "The Clintons" used to be a Republican trope, calculated to make one or the other half of the couple look like a puppet or a victim or a co-conspirator; now it is simply descriptive. Bill Clinton's talents are immense, and so are those of Hillary Clinton. But the events of the past few weeks have suggested that the peculiar dynamics of the Clinton marriage, which distorted the workings of the first Clinton White House in areas ranging from its failed health-care initiative to its inability to quash the Whitewater hoax, would be carried over into a second.

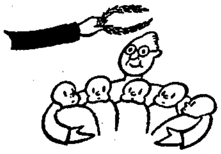
For some Democrats, a final straw has been the Clinton campaign's sudden interest in changing the rules. In Nevada, where the state's Democratic Party had provided special caucus sites for casino workers, Clinton allies tried to get them shut down after a union representing many of those workers endorsed Obama. The Democratic National Committee warned the Party's affiliates in Michigan and Florida that if they moved their primaries ahead of Tsunami Tuesday they would lose their Convention delegates. They did so anyway, and now Clinton—whose name was the only one on the Michigan ballot and who carried Florida, where no one campaigned—is demanding that the two states' delegates be accredited. Those delegates, added to the bulk of the unelected "superdelegates," could conceivably put Clinton over the top if Obama arrives at the Convention with a slight edge in delegates chosen by voters—a scenario that would bear an ugly resemblance to Florida, the popular vote, and the Supreme Court, circa 2000.

Last Thursday night's televised debate between the two remaining Democrats—a civilized and substantive conversation—has eased the tension. But politics ain't beanbag. One of the arguments made on behalf of the Clintons is that they know how to win. They do what is necessary. They fight hard. They've shown they can survive the worst the Republican attack machine can throw at them, next to which the relatively mild roughing-up they're giving Obama is downright Gandhian. But there are hard-nosed arguments for Obama, too. Nothing would energize the dispirited, disoriented Republicans like running against Hillary Clinton. And a late-entry challenge from Mayor Michael Bloomberg and his billions would be far less likely if Obama became the Democratic nominee.

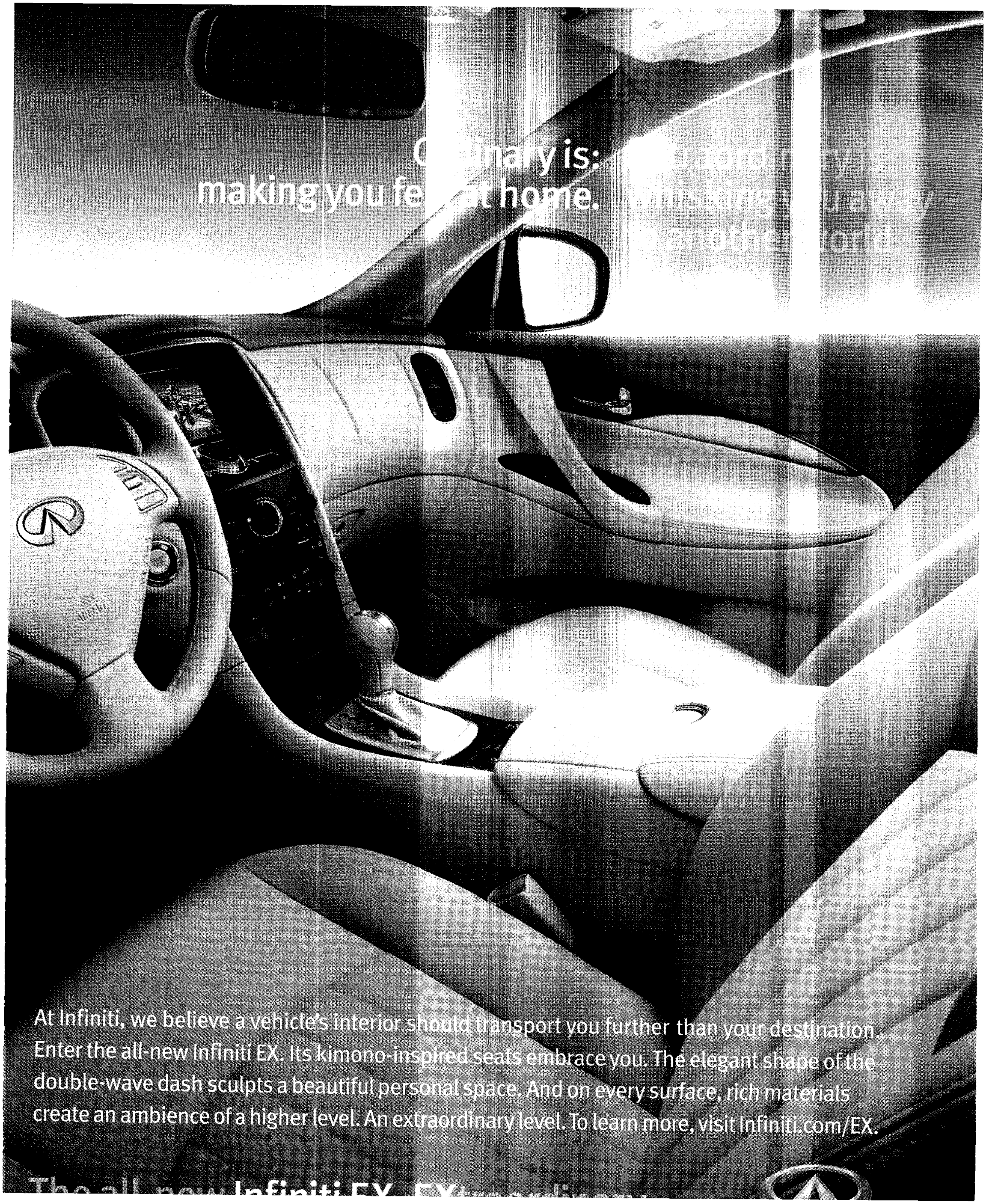
Obama's Democratic critics worry that his soaring rhetoric of reconciliation is naïve. But, as Mark Schmitt has argued in *The American Prospect*, Obama's national-unity pitch should be viewed as a tactic as well as an ideal. It might lengthen his coattails, helping Democratic candidates for the House and the Senate in marginally red districts and states. It would not protect him from attack, of course, but it would enable him to fire back from the high ground. And, as a new President elected with a not quite filibuster-proof Senate, he would be in a better position to peel off the handful of Republican senators he would need to make meaningful legislative progress than someone who started from a defensive crouch. Hillary Clinton would make a competent, knowledgeable, and responsible President. Barack Obama just might make a transformative one.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF DYNASTIES
FIVE ON FIVE



Fraternal pride has led to the establishment of many an enterprise: ask the Lehmans, the Warners, the Marxes, or the Jonases. Several months after Mitt Romney announced his intention to run for President, his sons—Tagg (thirty-seven), Matt (thirty-six), Josh (thirty-two), Ben (twenty-nine), and Craig (twenty-six)—decided to start a blog. Called Five Brothers, and illustrated with a picture of the toothy, block-jawed boys with their arms slung, Rockette style, around each other's shoulders, it is meant to serve as a public extension of the five-man e-mail distribution list through which they have long kept in touch. Tagg's two favorite moments so far: (1) when a reader wrote to say that Tagg looked like Tom Cruise and Josh wrote back, "No, it's Booger, from 'Revenge of the Nerds,' " and (2) when Tagg posted a home movie of the Romney summer vacation at New Hampshire's Lake Winnipesaukee. "It's not anything a campaign would do, but it's a very real look at who my dad is," Tagg said recently, of the video, which chronicles a day in the life of the clan, from volleyball to s'mores to fireworks (lots of "holy crap!"s) to Ann and Mitt slow-dancing while someone plays "Moon River" on the piano. "There's a funny part where we're set-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ting off fireworks and he's yelling at Craig to 'stop being a moron!' "

Ragging on each other, wholesomely, is a key Five Brothers pastime, and, given the absence of alcohol or girlfriends as fodder, the Romneys (they're all married teetotallers) get in some good digs. "Don't feel bad about thinking dad was a 'supernerd' when you were a teenager, Tagg," Josh writes. "We pretty much thought you were a dork, too. Turns out those clamdigger Jams weren't as cool as you thought they were after all (ha ha—just kidding)." Matt, in turn, tells a story about Craig getting hungry during a bike ride in Iowa: "The madder he got, the harder we laughed. But we finally found a farm that was selling homemade cookies, pies, and ice cream. . . . Craig got the strawberry rhubarb, Josh and I got the cherry." When Josh confesses to having recently short-sheeted his parents' bed, you can practically hear the gang cracking up as they jostle for the milk carton around the family fridge. Corny pranks aside, the Romney boys can be genuinely funny. "Here I am on the Extra Terrestrial Highway," Josh writes home, from Nevada. "I think we saw Dennis Kucinich driving the other direction."

The Five Brothers blog, as much as it's a banter board, is also a scrapbook (Uncle Rod and many dogs make appearances; Ann chimes in with the recipe for Mitt's favorite monkey bread) and a brag sheet (Craig's caption for a picture of him perched atop a pyramid of cheerleaders: "Not a bad start, huh? Go Mitt Go!"). It's a sports-metaphor anthology ("You only try tackling the guy who has the football, and it's clear the others all want to take on my dad"), a photomontage tribute to the great American road trip (Craig at Gatorama, Josh aboard a boat called the Rodney Candy, holding an improvised "m" over the first "d"), and, maybe more than anything else, the sustained, collaborative inscription to a never-ending Father's Day card. One of Josh's posts is titled "There Is Truly No One Else Like Him."

It's not hard to wonder: Do all sibling pentads get along this well, and, if they do, how would they get along with the Romneys? The question was put to Ron Hassoun, the Israeli-born proprietor of Five Brothers Audio and Video, in Williamsburg. The thirty-seven-year-old second son of what he describes as a "pretty boring" and "not very close" family, Ron—who'd been supporting Rudy Giuliani—said that he wasn't really interested in the Romneys, or in the fact that they, too, constitute Five Brothers. With a little prodding, however, he agreed to play ambassador on behalf of his siblings Ethan (thirty-nine), Jimmy (thirty-five), Stephen (twenty-five), and David (twenty-one) on a telephone call to Tagg Romney.

"Hey, Ron, how are you?" Tagg said, from St. Petersburg, Florida.

"Fine, how you doin', sir?"

"Good, thank you. So, uh, we apologize if we usurped you guys' name. We didn't mean to infringe on copyrights or anything."

"Don't worry, we're not gonna sue you!" Ron said.

He pulled a cell phone, ringing, out of the pocket of his jeans and answered, leaving Tagg hanging for a moment.

The Romney brothers

"It's my brother Jimmy," Ron said, coming back to the landline. "Good luck with the elections."

It was suggested that the Hassouns might make worthy opponents for one of the Romneys' frequent games of flag football.

"No, they'll kick our butts," Ron said. "But basketball, definitely."

"Ah, that'd be fun," Tagg said. "We'll see if we can get Madison Square Garden."

Ron was into it: "Five on five." Go, Hassouns!

—*Lauren Collins*

DEPT. OF PROGNOSTICATION

HOW 'BOUT THEM ECONOMY

Nobody knows anything, although some know-nothings know more than others. The economy is a stalwart, a shambles, or some combination of the two. The pronouncements and analogies fly: we've reached the end of a sixty-year cycle, or a twenty-five-year cycle, or a six-year cycle, or the end of nothing. It's 1929, 1969, 1981, 1990, 1997, or 2001 all over again. The closer you are to the markets, the gloomier you are, although the less likely you may be to suffer the consequences, and the more likely you are to act as though nothing were wrong: first rule of recession is you do not talk about recession. That is, unless you are in Davos, or heavily invested in gold. The preferred terms are "softening," "crunch," "correction," and, best of all, "interesting," as in "This is an *interesting time*"—a grudging corollary to the popular and meaningless Wall Streeter declaration "It is what it is." Yes, and the faster we go the rounder we get.

The debate over whether we're in (or slipping into) a recession is not purely semantic—a recession, capital "R," is a term of art—but it recalls the argument over whether the Sunni insurgency in Iraq was actually an insurgency or merely stuff happening. Whatever you call it—"rough patch," "adjustment process," "perfect storm"—it's here. Stuff is happening.

What's most befuddling is the question of the worthless paper. By worthless paper, the experts don't mean the one that people no longer read in the morning. They mean the I.O.U.s that stand no chance of being paid—the debt held by the person or institution who or which was foolish enough to buy it from the next-most-foolish person or institution, who or which may in fact have been not so much foolish as conniving (the F.B.I. is on the case). In recent years, the financial industry has concocted an arcane array of structured investment vehicles, in which the debts of individuals are bundled together by banks, stripped into pieces, and sold to investors. Many of these individual debts will not be repaid, and yet, once

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they'd been bundled and stripped, they were magically reconstituted as investment-grade debt products—worthy paper. Now the alchemy is coming undone; unpaid debts are revealing themselves to be unpayable. The extent of the damage will determine whether 2008 is 2001 or 1929, or something in between.

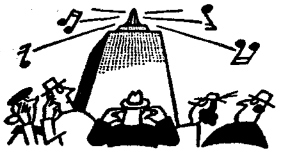
Although anyone making the case for looking on the bright side or the dark has to be suspected of talking his position, each argument is seductive, in its way. A call the other day to James Sinclair, a well-known gold bug, suggested that by decade's end we'll all be living in caves, or, at least, be carting our worthless paper around in wheelbarrows. "The geeks have killed us all," he said, referring to the math whizzes who devised all the fancy, inscrutable derivatives. "There are more than five hundred trillion dollars' worth of these things floating around in cyberspace. There's no money in them." As for the dollar, he said, citing the Weimar Republic, "How long can you monetize bankruptcy?"

A few minutes later, it was Arthur Gray on the line, from the Virgin Islands. Gray, who is eighty-five and a money manager at a firm called Carret, has been in the game since 1945. Age and experience incline him to the long view. "As Herman Kahn pointed out, two hundred years ago almost everyone was poor," he said. "Today, somebody on welfare in our country lives better than a maharaja did two hundred years ago. The maharaja had two hundred slaves fanning him; today, you push a button and have air-conditioning. So, as Kahn said, two hundred years from now everybody will be affluent. I think it's a wonderful world. I can't call this thing more than a hiccup." Hold your breath.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

BLACK HOLE



There are real differences between the original Bermuda Triangle (between Bermuda, Florida, and Puerto Rico) and the one that, as the *News* reported last week, plagues a five-block radius around the Empire State Building. The first affects planes and ships, and is attributable to (depending on your point of view) ocean-floor gases, magnetic fields, wind patterns, U.F.O.s, or a time warp. The second takes down cars. As soon as vehicles approach the Empire State Building, things get weird: locks stop functioning; engines die. The cause, some experts believe, is the giant cluster of antennas at the top of the building, which interferes with cars' remote key-lock systems. In the case of both Triangles, the victims and the authorities can't agree. Empire State Building officials deny the claims; doormen and tow-truck drivers stand behind them. "Every day it's at least four breakdowns," Rony Yaakobovitch, the president of the neighborhood AAA service, said.

In a city full of malevolent electricity—cell-phone dead zones, electrified manhole covers—the antenna theory sounded plausible. "It's possible," Brian Klopfer, a mechanic with Union Electronics, who works on electric-key and alarm systems, said. Klopfer explained that many alarm and key-lock systems use radio signals, which can go haywire around large antennas. Car alarms, he added, often have a "starter kill" built into them, which shuts off the engine. Paul Diament, a professor at Columbia who specializes in electromagnetics, confirmed this but was skeptical about the Empire State Building's role: "Blaming the antenna—you might as well blame the little green men on Mars." More likely, he said, something else in the area, perhaps ground-level electrical equipment, had caused "sparking." But to know for sure, he said, "it would have to be tested."

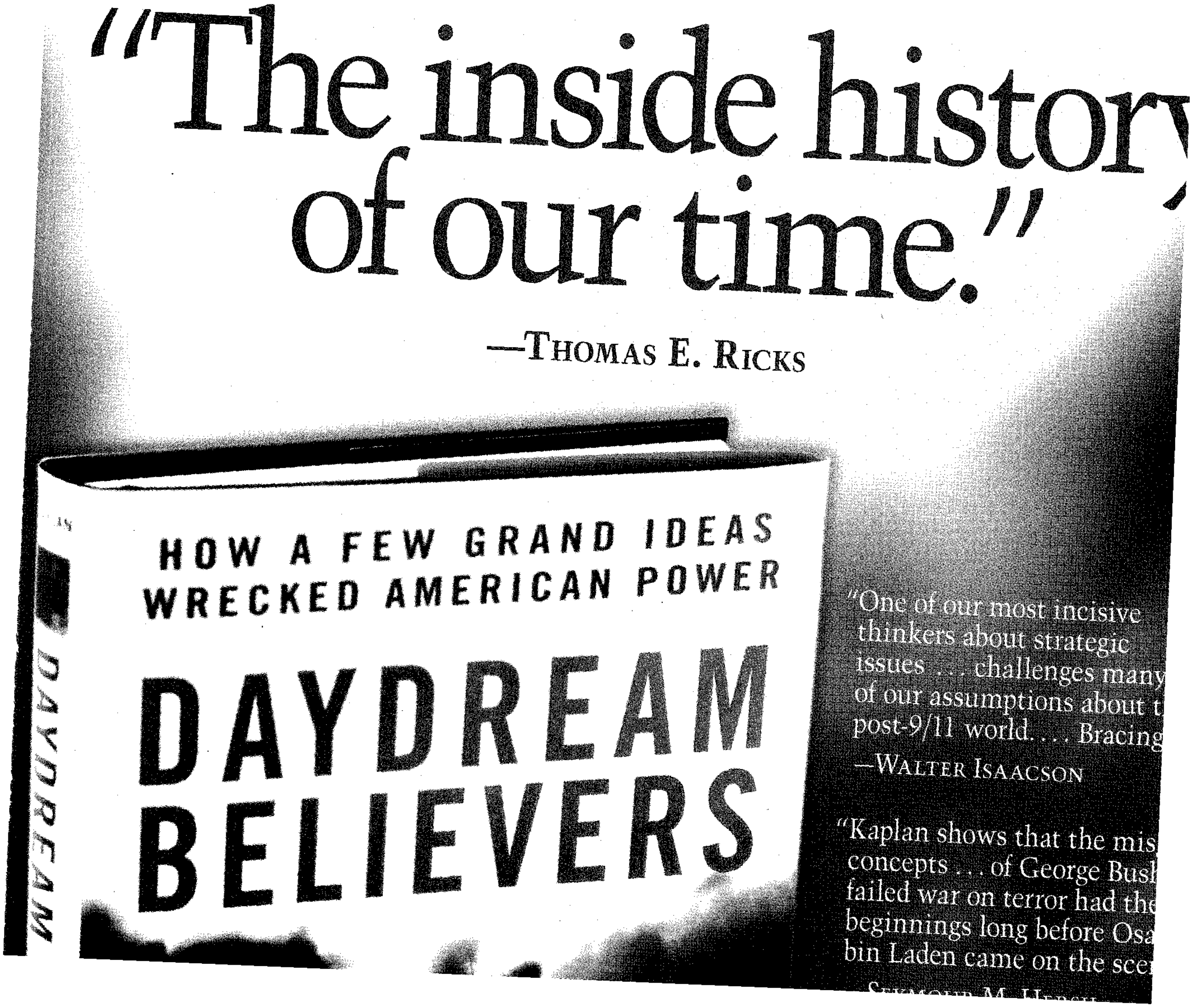
With no official studies on the horizon, a highly scientific Talk of the Town field test was arranged. The equipment: an Electrosmog meter ($199), a remote-control-type thing with a digital readout topped by a yellow plastic ball, which, according to an Internet vender, is used to measure radio-wave pollution; a test vehicle (a 2005 Ford Crown Victoria taxi, with remote key lock); and a pilot (Michael Gati, a cabdriver for thirty years). The experimenter, remembering that Columbus's compass had behaved erratically in the Bermuda Triangle, brought one, too.

Forty-first Street and Fifth Avenue: cloudy skies. The Electrosmog meter settled into the six- or seven-volts-per-metre range. (A control reading in Bryant Park had measured 3.5.) Gati turned on some jazz—coming in fuzzy—and noted, as the car crossed into the danger zone, that he often has problems with the radio near the Empire State Building. "88.3 gets a little staticky," he said. "I lose it between Fortieth and Twenty-fifth on Fifth Avenue." At Thirty-ninth Street, Gati pulled over, shut off the engine, and tried his door-operating remote. "Lock. Unlock. Nothing." He tried the engine. "Shut it off. Start it up. Hopefully, nothing weird will happen." (Nothing did.)

The numbers on the Electrosmog meter went down heading south on Fifth Avenue, and dropped below one volt per metre in front of the Empire State Building. Gati pulled over again and checked the compass: "South. South seems right." He switched to another station—Ricky Martin. The sound was terrible. "One more thing I noticed about that static," he said. "On sunny days, it's worse than on rainy days." At Twenty-fifth Street, the compass was still functioning, but the Electrosmog meter had started to climb. Gati turned around, and, heading north on Madison, he squinted up at the illuminated top of the Empire State Building. "I have a theory," he said. "I think the building might block the antenna waves right underneath." An eye-of-the-storm scenario.

Next, a walking test: Electrosmog readings were high on Park Avenue, very high at the Polish Consulate, at Thirty-seventh and Madison, and low-to-normal outside Empire Erotica, at Thirty-third and Broadway. Then, on the ground floor of the Empire State Building, a breakthrough: the Electrosmog meter dropped to zero, and the compass, placed on the floor in the middle of a hallway, read backward—South pointed North. No test results could be gathered from the top of the building. The Electrosmog meter was confiscated by security guards before it could get through a metal detector, and the experimenter, after being made to wait for a supervisor, was asked, "What are you doing in here with an R.F. meter?" The supervisor called the corporate office on his BlackBerry. It seemed like a good time to vanish without a trace.

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*



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HOW A FEW GRAND IDEAS WRECKED AMERICAN POWER

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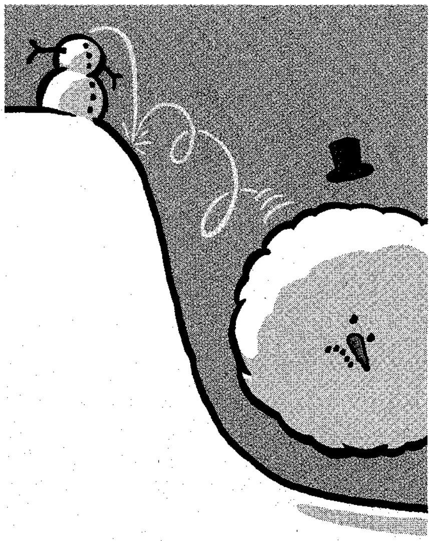
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
BONDS UNBOUND

If the ongoing turmoil in the world's financial markets has made anything clear, it's that the list of things that can go wrong in those markets is a very long one. Month after month, it seems, another potentially disastrous problem rises to the surface. The latest looming crisis is the possible implosion of a group of companies called monoline insurers. If you haven't heard of monoline insurers, don't worry: until recently, few people, even on Wall Street, were all that interested in them. Yet their problems have become a serious threat to global markets. Rumors that monoline insurers, like M.B.I.A. and Ambac, were in serious trouble helped spark the vast market sell-off that prompted the Federal Reserve's interest-rate cut two weeks ago, and, only a few days later, rumors of a government-orchestrated bailout of these companies set off a six-hundred-point rally in the Dow.

Monoline insurers do a straightforward job: they insure securities—guaranteeing, for instance, that if a bond defaults they'll cover the interest and the principal. Historically, this was a fairly sleepy business; these companies got their start by insuring municipal bonds, which rarely default, and initially they confined themselves to bonds with relatively predictable risks, which were easy to put a price on. Unfortunately, a sleepy, straightforward business wasn't good enough for the insurers. Like everyone else in recent years, they wanted to cash in on the housing and lending boom. In order to expand, they started insuring the complex securities that Wall Street created by packaging mortgages, including subprime ones, for investors. This was a lucrative business—M.B.I.A.'s revenues rose nearly a hundred and forty per cent between 2001 and 2006—but it rested on a false assumption: that the insurers knew how risky these securities really were. They didn't. Instead, they gravely underestimated how likely the loans were to go bad, which meant that they didn't charge enough for the insurance they were offering, and didn't put away enough to cover the claims. They're now on the hook for tens of billions of dollars in potential losses, and some estimates suggest that they'll need more than a hundred billion to restore themselves to health.

Obviously, this is bad news for the insurers—at one point, M.B.I.A.'s and Ambac's stock prices were down more than ninety per cent from their all-time highs—but it's also very dangerous for credit markets as a whole. This is because of a peculiar feature of bond insurance: insurers' credit ratings get automatically applied to any bond they insure. M.B.I.A. and Ambac have enjoyed the highest rating possible, AAA. As a result, any bond they insured, no matter how junky, became an AAA security, which meant access to more investors and a generally lower interest rate. The problem is that this process works in reverse, too. If the insurers lose their AAA ratings—credit agencies have made clear that both companies are at risk of this, and one agency has already downgraded Ambac to AA—then the bonds they've insured will lose their ratings as well, which will leave investors holding billions upon billions in assets worth a lot less than they thought. That's why so many people on Wall Street are pushing for a bailout for the insurers. It may be an abandonment of free-market principles, but no one has ever accused the Street of putting principle above profit.



Normally when companies make bad decisions and fail to deliver value, it's just their workers and investors who suffer. But monoline insurers' desire to grab as much new business as they could, risks be damned, quickly radiated across global markets and will have huge consequences for millions of people who have never heard of M.B.I.A. or Ambac. The situation illustrates a fundamental paradox of today's financial system: it's bigger than ever, but terrible decisions by just a few companies—not even very big companies, at that—can make the entire edifice totter.

In that sense, the potential collapse of monoline insurers looks like a classic example of what the sociologist Charles Perrow called a "normal accident." In examining disasters like the Challenger explosion and the near-meltdown at Three Mile Island, Perrow argued that while the events were unforeseeable they were also, in some sense, inevitable, because of the complexity and the interconnectedness of the systems involved. When you have systems with lots of moving parts, he said, some of them are bound to fail. And if they are tightly linked to one another—as in our current financial system—then the failure of just a few parts cascades through the system. In essence, the more complicated and intertwined the system is, the smaller the margin of safety.

Today, as financial markets become ever more complex, these kinds of unanticipated ripple effects are more common—think of the havoc wrought a couple of weeks ago when the activities of one rogue French trader came to light. In the past thirty years, thanks to the combination of globalization, deregulation, and the increase in computing power, we have seen an explosion in financial innovation. This innovation has had all kinds of benefits—making cheap capital available to companies and individuals who previously couldn't get it, allowing risk to be more efficiently allocated, and widening the range of potential investments. On a day-to-day level, it may even have lowered volatility in the markets and helped make the real economy more stable. The problem is that these improvements have been accompanied by more frequent systemic breakdowns. It may be that investors accept periodic disasters as a price worth paying for the innovations of modern finance, but now is probably not the best time to ask them about it.

—*James Surowiecki*

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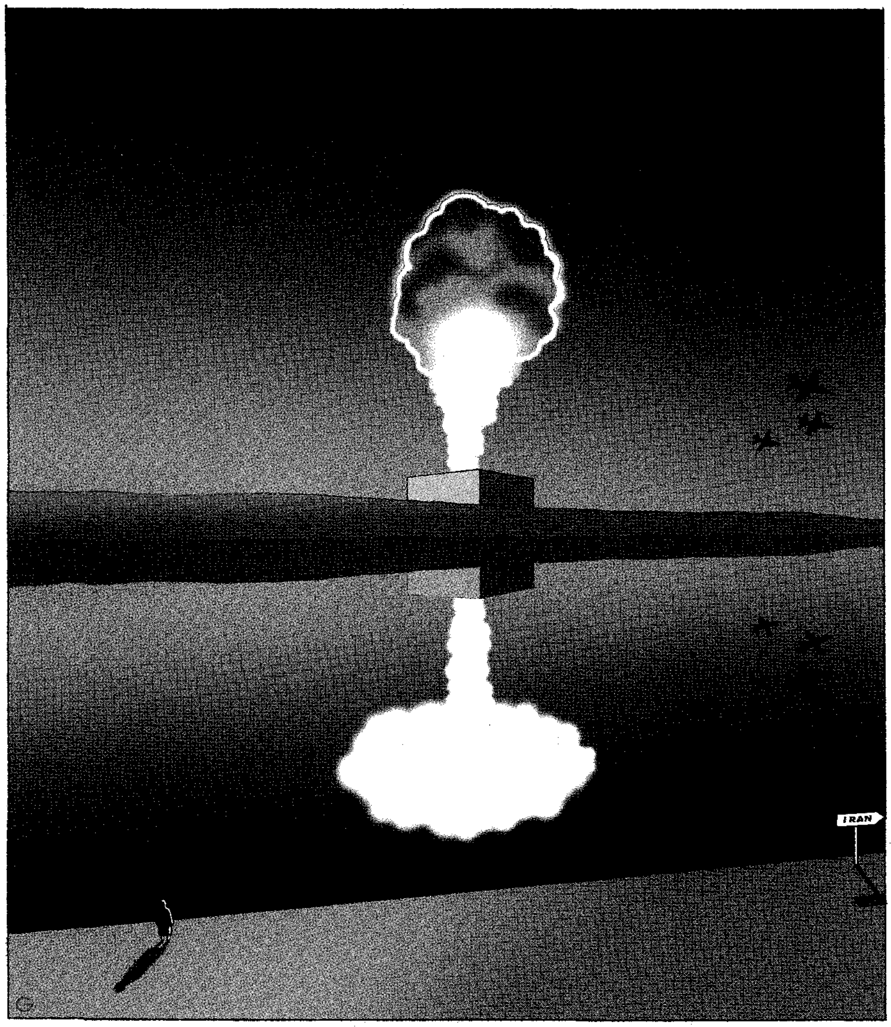
A STRIKE IN THE DARK

What did Israel bomb in Syria?

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH



Israel and the U.S. have avoided comment on press reports about a nuclear facility.

GUY BILLOUT

Sometime after midnight on September 6, 2007, at least four low-flying Israeli Air Force fighters crossed into Syrian airspace and carried out a secret bombing mission on the banks of the Euphrates River, about ninety miles north of the Iraq border. The seemingly unprovoked bombing, which came after months of heightened tension between Israel and Syria over military exercises and troop buildups by both sides along the Golan Heights, was, by almost any definition, an act of war. But in the immediate aftermath nothing was heard from the government of Israel. In contrast, in 1981, when the Israeli Air Force destroyed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor, near Baghdad, the Israeli government was triumphant, releasing reconnaissance photographs of the strike and permitting the pilots to be widely interviewed.

Within hours of the attack, Syria denounced Israel for invading its airspace, but its public statements were incomplete and contradictory—thus adding to the mystery. A Syrian military spokesman said only that Israeli planes had dropped some munitions in an unpopulated area after being challenged by Syrian air defenses, "which forced them to flee." Four days later, Walid Moallem, the Syrian foreign minister, said during a state visit to Turkey that the Israeli aircraft had used live ammunition in the attack, but insisted that there were no casualties or property damage. It was not until October 1st that Syrian President Bashar Assad, in an interview with the BBC, acknowledged that the Israeli warplanes had hit their target, which he described as an "unused military building." Assad added that Syria reserved the right to retaliate, but his comments were muted.

Despite official silence in Tel Aviv (and in Washington), in the days after the bombing the American and European media were flooded with reports, primarily based on information from anonymous government sources, claiming that Israel had destroyed a nascent nuclear reactor that was secretly being assembled in Syria, with the help of North Korea. Beginning construction of a nuclear reactor in secret would be a violation of Syria's obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and could potentially yield material for a nuclear weapon.

The evidence was circumstantial but seemingly damning. The first reports of Syrian and North Korean nuclear coöperation came on September 12th in the *Times* and elsewhere. By the end of October, the various media accounts generally agreed on four points: the Israeli intelligence community had learned of a North Korean connection to a construction site in an agricultural area in eastern Syria; three days before the bombing, a "North Korean ship," identified as the Al Hamed, had arrived at the Syrian port of Tartus, on the Mediterranean; satellite imagery strongly suggested that the building under construction was designed to hold a nuclear reactor when completed; as such, Syria had crossed what the Israelis regarded as the "red line" on the path to building a bomb, and had to be stopped. There were also reports—by ABC News and others—that some of the Israeli intelligence had been shared in advance with the United States, which had raised no objection to the bombing.

The Israeli government still declined to make any statement about the incident. Military censorship on dispatches about the raid was imposed for several weeks, and the Israeli press resorted to recycling the disclosures in the foreign press. In the first days after the attack, there had been many critical stories in the Israeli press speculating about the bombing, and the possibility that it could lead to a conflict with Syria. Larry Derfner, a columnist writing in the Jerusalem *Post*, described the raid as "the sort of thing that starts wars." But, once reports about the nuclear issue and other details circulated, the domestic criticism subsided.

At a news conference on September 20th, President George W. Bush was asked about the incident four times but said, "I'm not going to comment on the matter." The lack of official statements became part of the story. "The silence from all parties has been deafening," David Ignatius wrote in the Washington *Post*, "but the message to Iran"—which the Administration had long suspected of pursuing a nuclear weapon—"is clear: America and Israel can identify nuclear targets and penetrate air defenses to destroy them."

It was evident that officials in Israel and the United States, although unwilling to be quoted, were eager for the news media to write about the bombing. Early on, a former officer in the Israel Defense Forces with close contacts in Israeli intelligence approached me, with a version of the standard story, including colorful but, as it turned out, unconfirmable details: Israeli intelligence tracking the ship from the moment it left a North Korean port; Syrian soldiers wearing protective gear as they off-loaded the cargo; Israeli intelligence monitoring trucks from the docks to the target site. On October 3rd, the London *Spectator*, citing much of the same information, published an overheated account of the September 6th raid, claiming that it "may have saved the world from a devastating threat," and that "a very senior British ministerial source" had warned, "If people had known how close we came to World War Three that day there'd have been mass panic."

However, in three months of reporting for this article, I was repeatedly told by current and former intelligence, diplomatic, and congressional officials that they were not aware of any solid evidence of ongoing nuclear-weapons programs in Syria. It is possible that Israel conveyed intelligence directly to senior members of the Bush Administration, without it being vetted by intelligence agencies. (This process, known as "stovepiping," overwhelmed U.S. intelligence before the war in Iraq.) But Mohamed ElBaradei, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations group responsible for monitoring compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, said, "Our experts who have carefully analyzed the satellite imagery say it is unlikely that this building was a nuclear facility."

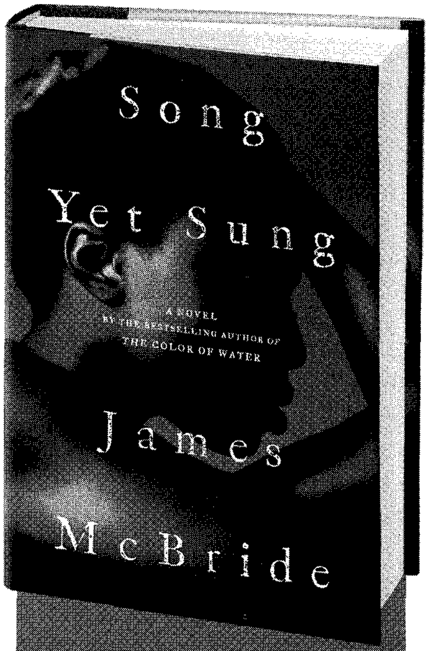
Joseph Cirincione, the director for nuclear policy at the Center for American Progress, a Washington, D.C., think tank, told me, "Syria does not have the technical, industrial, or financial ability to support a nuclear-weapons program. I've been following this issue for fifteen years, and every once in a while a suspicion arises and we investigate and there's nothing. There was and is no nuclear-weapons threat from Syria. This is all political." Cirincione castigated the press corps for its handling of the story. "I think some of our best journalists were used," he said.

A similar message emerged at briefings given to select members of Congress within weeks of the attack. The briefings, conducted by intelligence agencies, focussed on what Washington knew about the September 6th raid. One concern was whether North Korea had done anything that might cause the U.S. to back away from ongoing six-nation talks about its nuclear program. A legislator who took part in one such briefing said afterward, according to a member of his staff, that he had heard nothing that caused him "to have any doubts" about the North Korean negotiations—"nothing that should cause a pause." The legislator's conclusion, the staff member said, was "There's nothing that proves any perfidy involving the North Koreans."

Morton Abramowitz, a former Assistant Secretary of State for intelligence and research, told me that he was astonished by the lack of response. "Anytime you bomb another state, that's a big deal," he said. "But where's the outcry, particularly from the concerned states and the U.N.? Something's amiss."

Israel could, of course, have damning evidence that it refuses to disclose. But there are serious and unexamined contradictions in the various published accounts of the September 6th bombing.

The main piece of evidence to emerge publicly that Syria was building a reactor arrived on October 23rd, when David Albright, of the Institute for Sci-



Song
Yet
Sung

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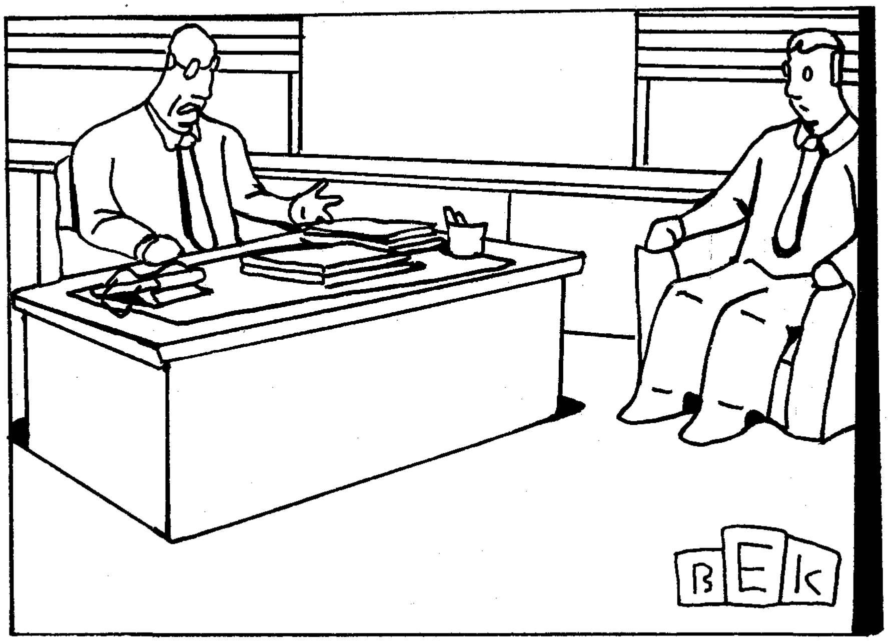
ence and International Security, a highly respected nonprofit research group, released a satellite image of the target. The photograph had been taken by a commercial satellite company, DigitalGlobe, of Longmont, Colorado, on August 10th, four weeks before the bombing, and showed a square building and a nearby water-pumping station. In an analysis released at the same time, Albright, a physicist who served as a weapons inspector in Iraq, concluded that the building, as viewed from space, had roughly the same length and width as a reactor building at Yongbyon, North Korea's main nuclear facility. "The tall building in the image may house a reactor under construction and the pump station along the river may have been intended to supply cooling water to the reactor," Albright said. He concluded his analysis by posing a series of rhetorical questions that assumed that the target was a nuclear facility:

> How far along was the reactor construction project when it was bombed? What was the extent of nuclear assistance from North Korea? Which reactor components did Syria obtain from North Korea or elsewhere, and where are they now?

He was later quoted in the Washington *Post* saying, "I'm pretty convinced that Syria was trying to build a nuclear reactor."

When I asked Albright how he had pinpointed the target, he told me that he and a colleague, Paul Brannan, "did a lot of hard work"—culling press reports and poring over DigitalGlobe imagery—"before coming up with the site." Albright then shared his findings with Robin Wright and other journalists at the *Post*, who, after checking with Administration officials, told him that the building was, indeed, the one targeted by the Israelis. "We did not release the information until we got direct confirmation from the Washington *Post*," he told me. The *Post's* sources in the Administration, he understood, had access to far more detailed images obtained by U.S. intelligence satellites. The *Post* ran a story, without printing the imagery, on October 19th, reporting that "U.S. and foreign officials familiar with the aftermath of the attack" had concluded that the site had the "signature," or characteristics, of a reactor "similar in structure to North Korea's facilities"—a conclusion with which Albright then agreed. In other words, the Albright and the *Post* reports, which appeared to independently reinforce each other, stemmed in part from the same sources.

Albright told me that before going public he had met privately with Israeli officials. "I wanted to be sure in my own mind that the Israelis thought it was a reactor, and I was," he said. "They never explicitly said it was nuclear, but they ruled out the possibility that it was a missile, chemical-warfare, or radar site. By a process of elimination, I was left with nuclear."



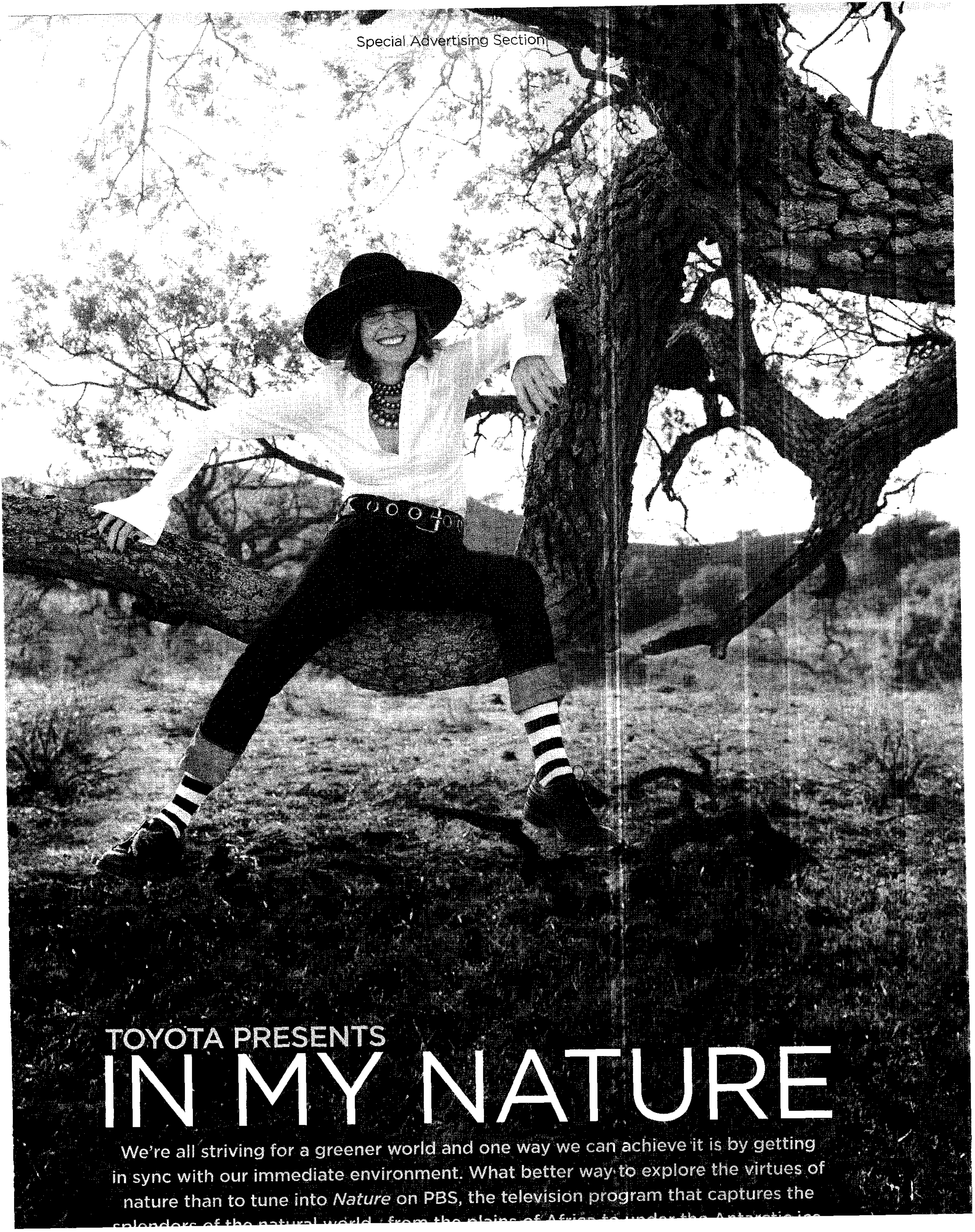
"Maybe this isn't the right heartless monolithic corporation for you."

Two days after his first report, Albright released a satellite image of the bombed site, taken by DigitalGlobe on October 24th, seven weeks after the bombing. The new image showed that the target area had been levelled and the ground scraped. Albright said that it hinted of a coverup—cleansing the bombing site could make it difficult for weapons inspectors to determine its precise nature. "It looks like Syria is trying to hide something and destroy the evidence of some activity," he told the *Times*. "But it won't work. Syria has got to answer questions about what it was doing." This assessment was widely shared in the press. (In mid-January, the *Times* reported that recent imagery from DigitalGlobe showed that a storage facility, or something similar, had been constructed, in an obvious rush, at the bombing site.)

Proliferation experts at the International Atomic Energy Agency and others in the arms-control community disputed Albright's interpretation of the images. "People here were baffled by this, and thought that Albright had stuck his neck out," a diplomat in Vienna, where the I.A.E.A. is headquartered, told me. "The I.A.E.A. has been consistently telling journalists that it is skeptical about the Syrian nuclear story, but the reporters are so convinced."

A second diplomat in Vienna acidly commented on the images: "A square building is a square building." The diplomat, who is familiar with the use of satellite imagery for nuclear verification, added that the I.A.E.A. "does not have enough information to conclude anything about the exact nature of the facility. They see a building with some geometry near a river that could be identified as nuclear-related. But they cannot credibly conclude that is so. As far as information coming from open sources beyond imagery, it's a struggle to extract information from all of the noise that comes from political agendas."

Much of what one would expect to see around a secret nuclear site was lacking at the target, a former State Department intelligence expert who now deals with proliferation issues for the Congress said. "There is no security around the building," he said. "No barracks for the Army or the workers. No associated complex." Jeffrey Lewis, who



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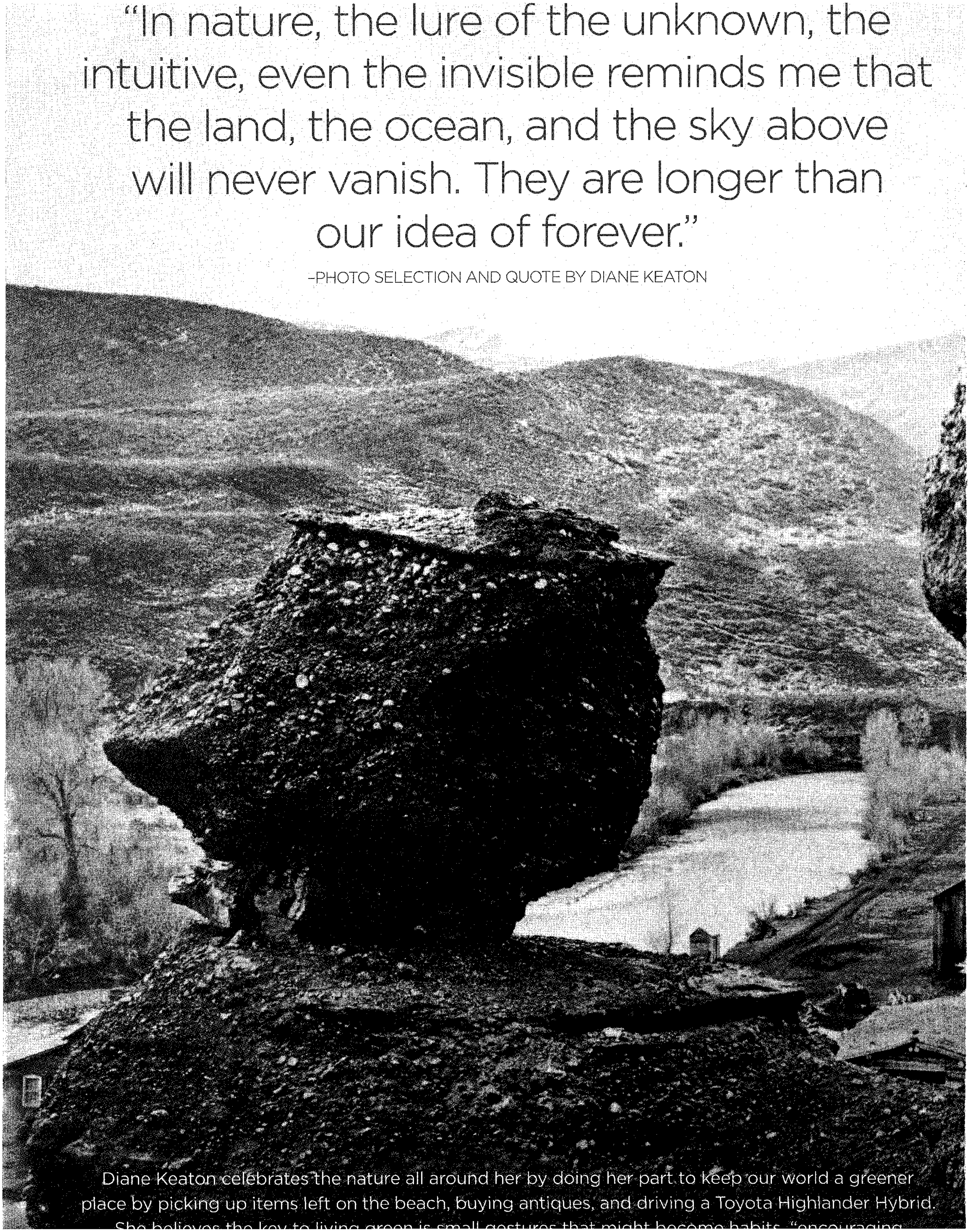

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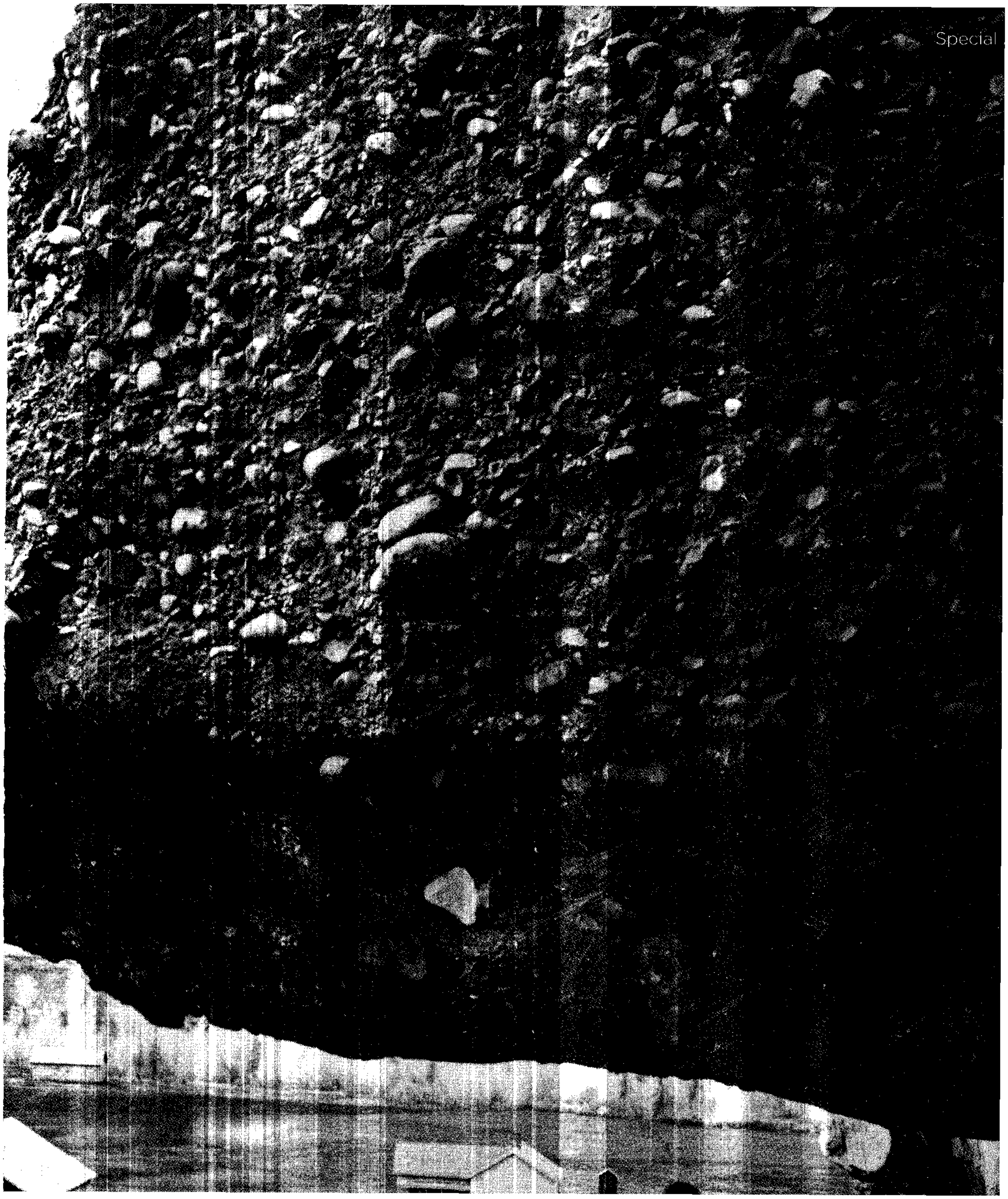
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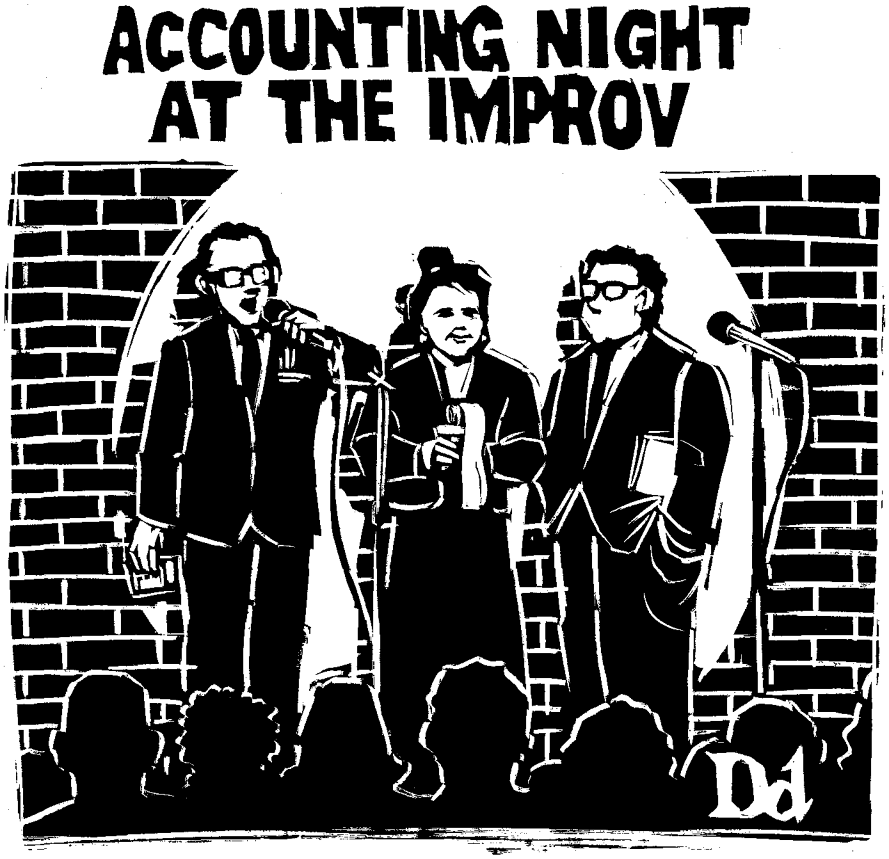
heads the non-proliferation program at the New America Foundation, a think tank in Washington, told me that, even if the width and the length of the building were similar to the Korean site, its height was simply not sufficient to contain a Yongbyon-size reactor and also have enough room to extract the control rods, an essential step in the operation of the reactor; nor was there evidence in the published imagery of major underground construction. "All you could see was a box," Lewis said. "You couldn't see enough to know how big it will be or what it will do. It's just a box."

A former senior U.S. intelligence official, who has access to current intelligence, said, "We don't have any proof of a reactor—no signals intelligence, no human intelligence, no satellite intelligence." Some well-informed defense consultants and former intelligence officials asked why, if there was compelling evidence of nuclear cheating involving North Korea, a member of the President's axis of evil, and Syria, which the U.S. considers a state sponsor of terrorism, the Bush Administration would not insist on making it public.

When I went to Israel in late December, the government was still maintaining secrecy about the raid, but some current and former officials and military officers were willing to speak without attribution. Most were adamant that Israel's intelligence had been accurate. "Don't you write that there was nothing there!" a senior Israeli official, who is in a position to know the details of the raid on Syria, said, shaking a finger at me. "The thing in Syria was real."

Retired Brigadier General Shlomo Brom, who served as deputy national-security adviser under Prime Minister Ehud Barak, told me that Israel wouldn't have acted if it hadn't been convinced that there was a threat. "It may have been a perception of a conviction, but there was something there," Brom said. "It was the beginning of a nuclear project." However, by the date of our talk, Brom told me, "The question of whether it was there or not is not that relevant anymore."

Albright, when I spoke to him in December, was far more circumspect than he had been in October. "We never said 'we know' it was a reactor, based on the image," Albright said. "We wanted to make sure that the image was *consistent* with a reactor, and, from my point of view, it was. But that doesn't confirm it's a reactor."


ACCOUNTING NIGHT AT THE IMPROV

"Now is the part of the show when we ask the audience to shout out some random numbers."

• •

The journey of the Al Hamed, a small coastal trader, became a centerpiece in accounts of the September 6th bombing. On September 15th, the Washington *Post* reported that "a prominent U.S. expert on the Middle East" said that the attack "appears to have been linked to the arrival . . . of a ship carrying material from North Korea labeled as cement." The article went on to cite the expert's belief that "the emerging consensus in Israel was that it delivered nuclear equipment." Other press reports identified the Al Hamed as a "suspicious North Korean" ship.

But there is evidence that the Al Hamed could not have been carrying sensitive cargo—or any cargo—from North Korea. International shipping is carefully monitored by Lloyd's Marine Intelligence Unit, which relies on a network of agents as well as on port logs and other records. In addition, most merchant ships are now required to operate a transponder device called an A.I.S., for automatic identification system. This device, which was on board the Al Hamed, works in a manner similar to a transponder on a commercial aircraft—beaming a constant, very high-frequency position report. (The U.S. Navy monitors international sea traffic with the aid of dedicated satellites, at a secret facility in suburban Washington.)

According to Marine Intelligence Unit records, the Al Hamed, which was built in 1965, had been operating for years in the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, with no indication of any recent visits to North Korea. The records show that the Al Hamed arrived at Tartus on September 3rd—the ship's fifth visit to Syria in five months. (It was one of eight ships that arrived that day; although it is possible that one of the others was carrying illicit materials, only the

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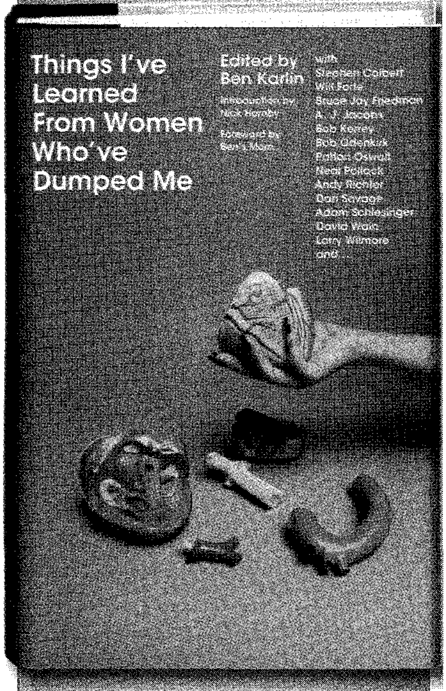

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Al Hamed has been named in the media.) The ship's registry was constantly changing. The Al Hamed flew the South Korean flag before switching to North Korea in November of 2005, and then to Comoros. (Ships often fly flags of convenience, registering with different countries, in many cases to avoid taxes or onerous regulations.) At the time of the bombing, according to Lloyd's, it was flying a Comoran flag and was owned by four Syrian nationals. In earlier years, under other owners, the ship seems to have operated under Russian, Estonian, Turkish, and Honduran flags. Lloyd's records show that the ship had apparently not passed through the Suez Canal—the main route from the Mediterranean to the Far East—since at least 1998.

Among the groups that keep track of international shipping is Greenpeace. Martini Gotjé, who monitors illegal fishing for the organization and was among the first to raise questions about the Al Hamed, told me, "I've been at sea for forty-one years, and I can tell you, as a captain, that the Al Hamed was nothing—in rotten shape. You wouldn't be able to load heavy cargo on it, as the floorboards wouldn't be that strong."

If the Israelis' target in Syria was not a nuclear site, why didn't the Syrians respond more forcefully? Syria complained at the United Nations but did little to press the issue. And, if the site wasn't a partially built reactor, what was it?

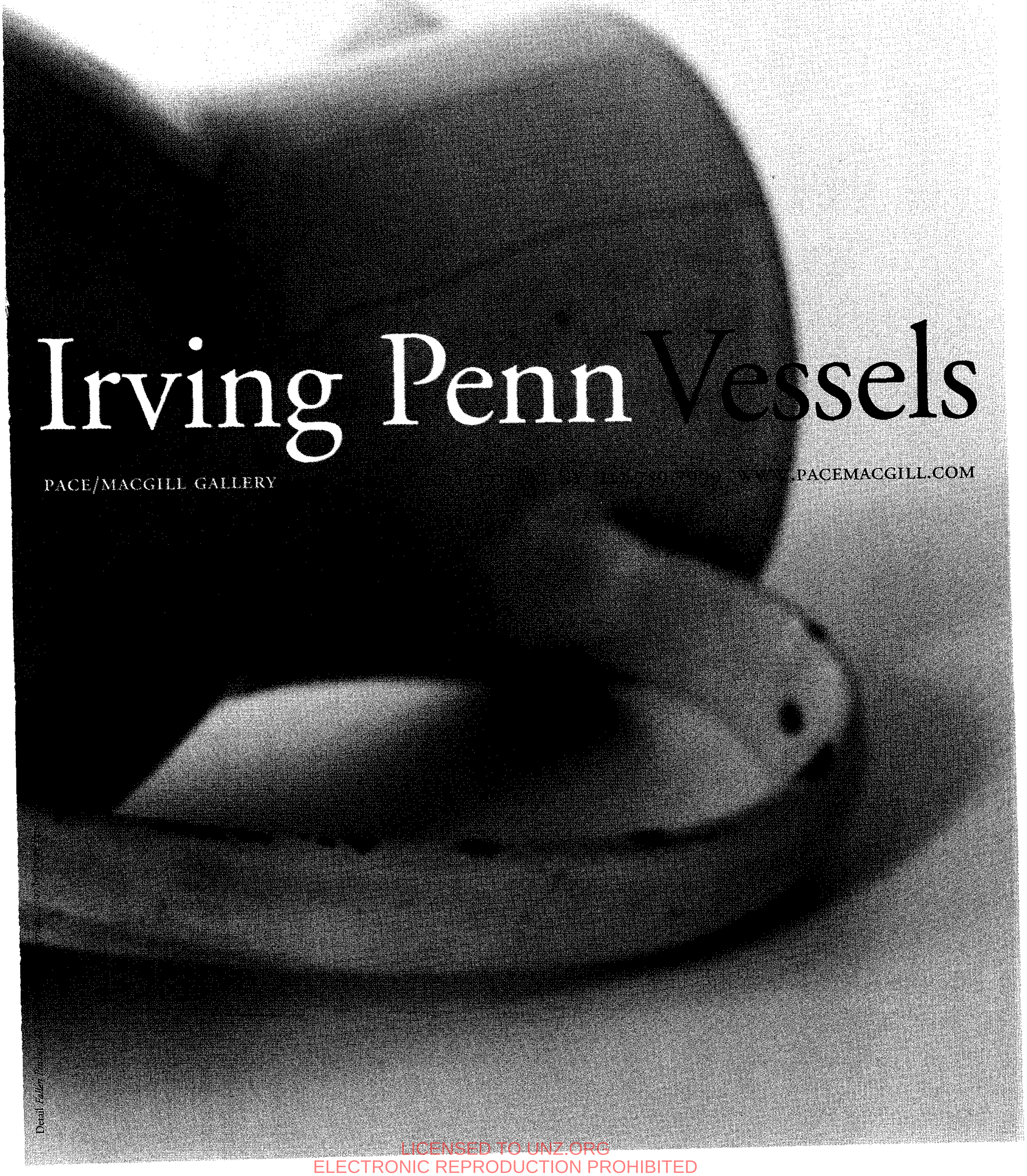
During two trips to Damascus after the Israeli raid, I interviewed many senior government and intelligence officials. None of President Assad's close advisers told me the same story, though some of the stories were more revealing—and more plausible—than others. In general, Syrian officials seemed more eager to analyze Israel's motives than to discuss what had been attacked. "I hesitate to answer any journalist's questions about it," Faruq al-Shara, the Syrian Vice-President, told me. "Israel bombed to restore its credibility, and their objective is for us to keep talking about it. And by answering your questions I serve their objective. Why should I volunteer to do that?" Shara denied that his nation has a nuclear-weapons program. "The volume of articles about the bombing is incredible, and it's not important that it's a lie," he said.

One top foreign-ministry official in Damascus told me that the target "was an old military building that had been abandoned by the Syrian military" years ago. But a senior Syrian intelligence general gave me a different account. "What they targeted was a building used for fertilizer and water pumps," he said—part of a government effort to revitalize farming. "There is a large city"—Dayr az Zawr—"fifty kilometres away. Why would Syria put nuclear material near a city?" I interviewed the intelligence general again on my second visit to Damascus, and he reiterated that the targeted building was "at no time a military facility." As to why Syria had not had a more aggressive response, if the target was so benign, the general said, "It was not fear—that's all I'll say." As I left, I asked the general why Syria had not invited representatives of the International Atomic Energy Agency to visit the bombing site and declare that no nuclear activity was taking place there. "They did not ask to come," he said, and "Syria had no reason to ask them to come."

An I.A.E.A. official dismissed that assertion when we spoke in Vienna a few days later. "The I.A.E.A. asked the Syrians to allow the agency to visit the site to verify its nature," the I.A.E.A. official said. "Syria's reply was that it was a military, not a nuclear, installation, and there would be no reason for the I.A.E.A. to go there. It would be in their and everyone's interest to have the I.A.E.A. visit the site. If it was nuclear, it would leave fingerprints."

In a subsequent interview, Imad Moustapha, the Syrian Ambassador to Washington, defended Syria's decision not to invite the I.A.E.A. inspectors. "We will not get into the game of inviting foreign experts to visit every site that Israel claims is a nuclear facility," Moustapha told me. "If we bring them in and they say there is nothing there, then Israel will say it made a mistake and bomb another site two weeks later. And if we then don't let the I.A.E.A. in, Israel will say, 'You see?' This is nonsense. Why should we have to do this?"

Even if the site was not a nuclear installation, it is possible that the Syrians feared that an I.A.E.A. inquiry would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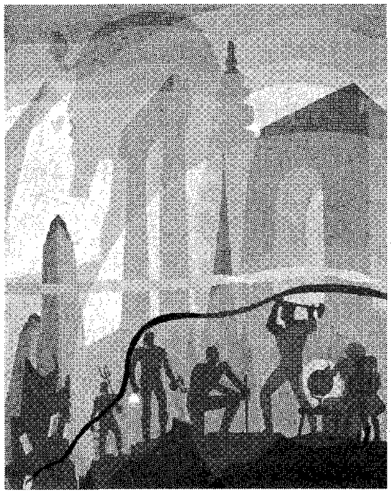

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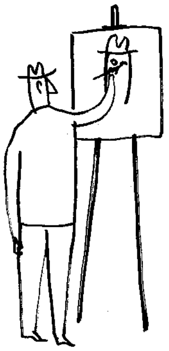
uncover the presence of North Koreans there. In Syria, I was able to get some confirmation that North Koreans were at the target. A senior officer in Damascus with firsthand knowledge of the incident agreed to see me alone, at his home; my other interviews in Damascus took place in government offices. According to his account, North Koreans were present at the site, but only as paid construction workers. The senior officer said that the targeted building, when completed, would most likely have been used as a chemical-warfare facility. (Syria is not a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention and has been believed, for decades, to have a substantial chemical-weapons arsenal.)



The building contract with North Korea was a routine business deal, the senior officer said—from design to construction. (North Korea may, of course, have sent skilled technicians capable of doing less routine work.) Syria and North Korea have a long-standing partnership on military matters. "The contract between Syria and North Korea was old, from 2002, and it was running late," the senior officer told me. "It was initially to be finished in 2005, and the Israelis might have expected it was further along."

The North Korean laborers had been coming and going for "maybe six months" before the September bombing, the senior officer said, and his government concluded that the Israelis had picked up North Korean telephone chatter at the site. (This fit the timeline that Israeli officials had given me.) "The Israelis may have their own spies and watched the laborers being driven to the area," the senior officer said. "The Koreans were not there at night, but slept in their quarters and were driven to the site in the morning. The building was in an isolated area, and the Israelis may have concluded that even if there was a slight chance"—of it being a nuclear facility—"we'll take that risk."

On the days before the bombing, the Koreans had been working on the second floor, and were using a tarp on top of the building to shield the site from rain and sun. "It was just the North Korean way of working," the Syrian senior officer said, adding that the possibility that the Israelis could not see what was underneath the tarp might have added to their determination.

The attack was especially dramatic, the Syrian senior officer said, because the Israelis used bright magnesium illumination flares to light up the target before the bombing. Night suddenly turned into day, he told me. "When the people in the area saw the lights and the bombing, they thought there would be a commando raid," the senior officer said. The building was destroyed, and his government eventually concluded that there were no Israeli ground forces in the area. But if Israelis had been on the ground seeking contaminated soil samples, the senior officer said, "they found only cement."

A senior Syrian official confirmed that a group of North Koreans had been at work at the site, but he denied that the structure was related to chemical warfare. Syria had concluded, he said, that chemical warfare had little deterrent value against Israel, given its nuclear capability. The facility that was attacked, the official said, was to be one of a string of missile-manufacturing plants scattered throughout Syria—"all low tech. Not strategic." (North Korea has been a major exporter of missile technology and expertise to Syria for decades.) He added, "We've gone asymmetrical, and have been improving our capability to build low-tech missiles that will enable us to inflict as much damage as possible without confronting the Israeli Army. We now can hit all of Israel, and not just the north."

Whatever was under construction, with North Korean help, it apparently had little to do with agriculture—or with nuclear reactors—but much to do with Syria's defense posture, and its military relationship with North Korea. And that, perhaps, was enough to silence the Syrian government after the September 6th bombing.

It is unclear to what extent the Bush Administration was involved in the Israeli attack. The most detailed report of coöperation was made in mid-October by ABC News. Citing a senior U.S. official, the network reported that Israel had shared intelligence with the United

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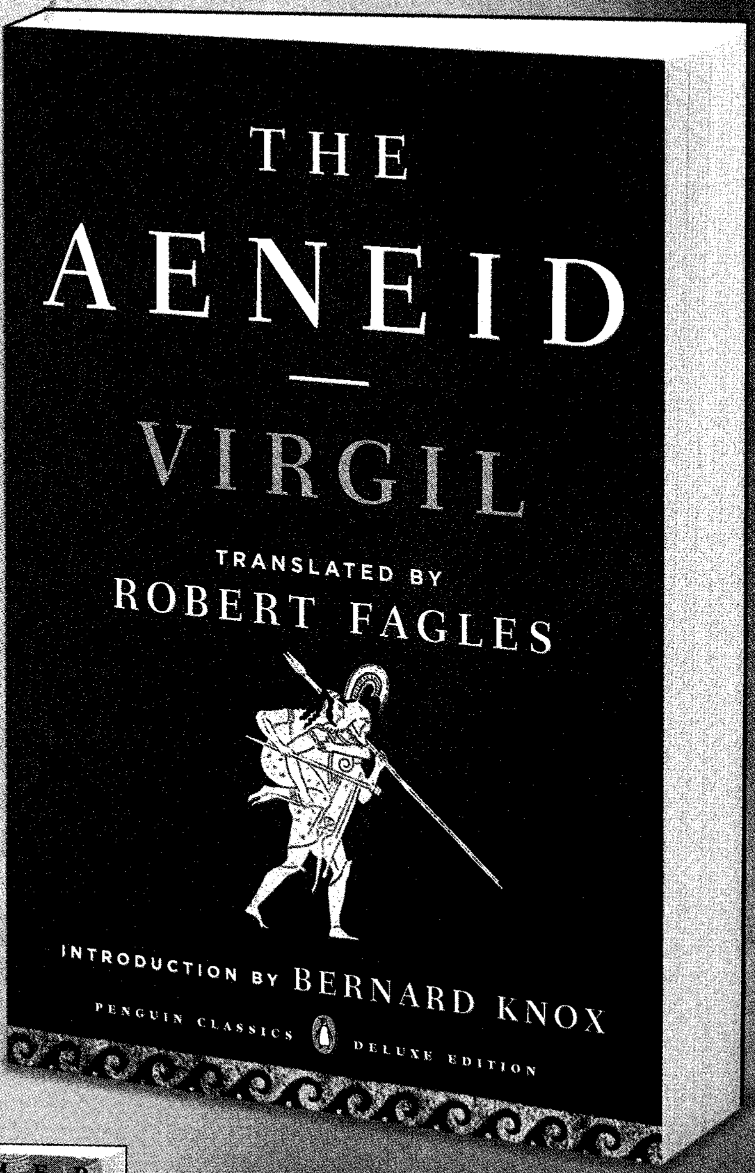
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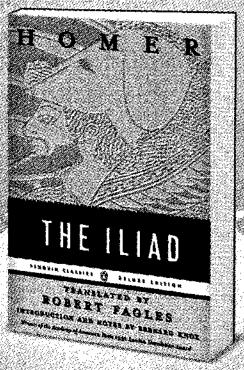
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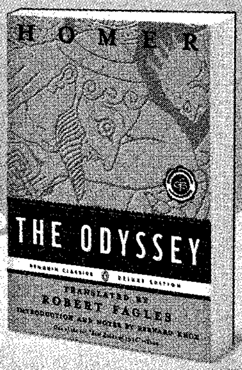
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States and received satellite help and targeting information in response. At one point, it was reported, the Bush Administration considered attacking Syria itself, but rejected that option. The implication was that the Israeli intelligence about the nuclear threat had been vetted by the U.S., and had been found to be convincing.

Yet officials I spoke to in Israel heatedly denied the notion that they had extensive help from Washington in planning the attack. When I told the senior Israeli official that I found little support in Washington for Israel's claim that it had bombed a nuclear facility in Syria, he responded with an expletive, and then said, angrily, "Nobody helped us. We did it on our own." He added, "What I'm saying is that nobody discovered it for us." (The White House declined to comment on this story.)

There is evidence to support this view. The satellite operated by DigitalGlobe, the Colorado firm that supplied Albright's images, is for hire; anyone can order the satellite to photograph specific coördinates, a process that can cost anywhere from several hundred to hundreds of thousands of dollars. The company displays the results of these requests on its Web page, but not the identity of the customer. On five occasions between August 5th and August 27th of last year—before the Israeli bombing—DigitalGlobe was paid to take a tight image of the targeted building in Syria.

Clearly, whoever ordered the images likely had some involvement in plans for the attack. DigitalGlobe does about sixty per cent of its business with the U.S. government, but those contracts are for unclassified work, such as mapping. The government's own military and intelligence satellite system, with an unmatched ability to achieve what analysts call "highly granular images," could have supplied superior versions of the target sites. Israel has at least two military satellite systems, but, according to Allen Thomson, a former C.I.A. analyst, DigitalGlobe's satellite has advantages for reconnaissance, making Israel a logical customer. ("Customer anonymity is crucial to us," Chuck Herring, a spokesman for DigitalGlobe, said. "I don't know who placed the order and couldn't disclose it if I did.") It is also possible that Israel or the United States ordered the imagery in order to have something unclassified to pass to the press if needed. If the Bush Administration had been aggressively coöperating with Israel before the attack, why would Israel have to turn to a commercial firm?

Last fall, aerospace industry and military sources told *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, an authoritative trade journal, that the United States had provided Israel with advice about "potential target vulnerabilities" before the September 6th attack, and monitored the radar as the mission took place. The magazine reported that the Israeli fighters, prior to bombing the target on the Euphrates, struck a Syrian radar facility near the Turkish border, knocking the radar out of commission and permitting them to complete their mission without interference.

The former U.S. senior intelligence official told me that, as he understood it, America's involvement in the Israeli raid dated back months earlier, and was linked to the Administration's planning for a possible air war against Iran. Last summer, the Defense Intelligence Agency came to believe that Syria was installing a new Russian-supplied radar-and-air-defense system that was similar to the radar complexes in Iran. Entering Syrian airspace would trigger those defenses and expose them to Israeli and American exploitation, yielding valuable information about their capabilities. Vice-President Dick Cheney supported the idea of overflights, the former senior intelligence official said, because "it would stick it to Syria and show that we're serious about Iran." (The Vice-President's office declined to comment.) The former senior intelligence official said that Israeli military jets have flown over Syria repeatedly, without retaliation from Syria. At the time, the former senior intelligence official said, the focus was on radar and air defenses, and not on any real or suspected nuclear facility. Israel's claims about the target, which emerged later, caught many in the military and intelligence community—if not in the White House—by surprise.

The senior Israeli official, asked whether the attack was rooted in his country's interest in Syria's radar installations,

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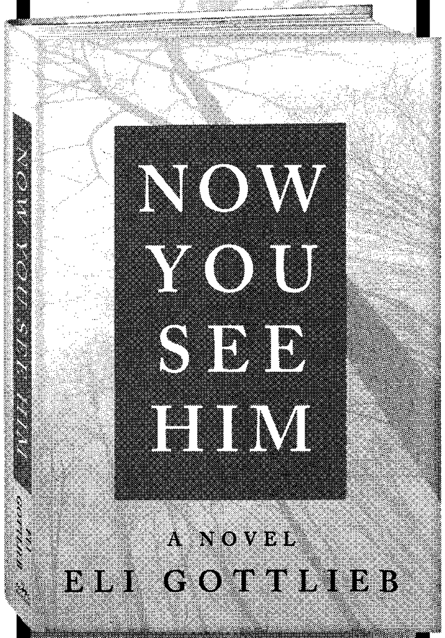

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told me, "Bullshit." Whatever the Administration's initial agenda, Israel seems to have been after something more.

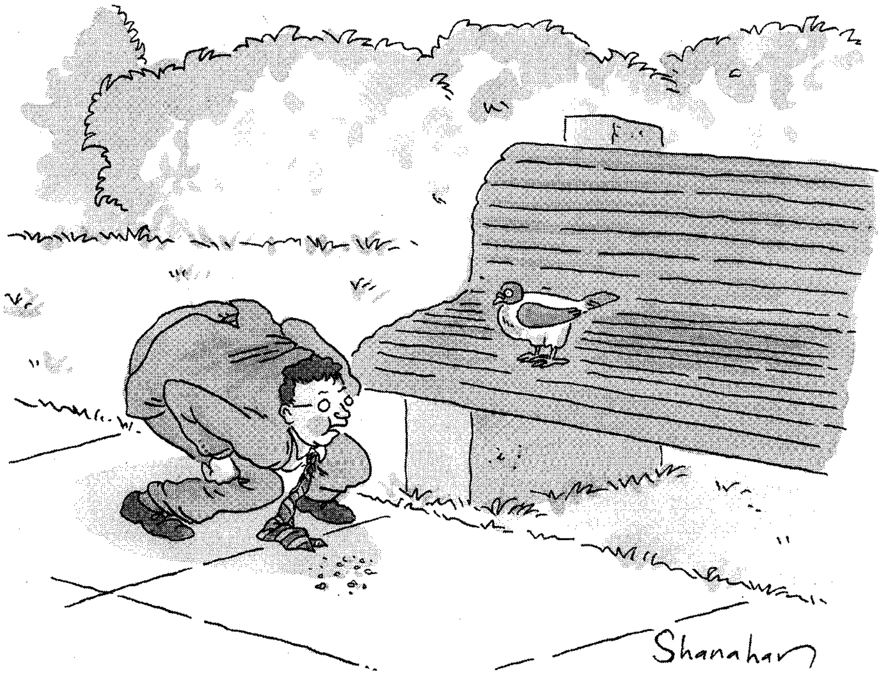
The story of the Israeli bombing of Syria, with its mixture of satellite intelligence, intercepts, newspaper leaks, and shared assumptions, reminded some American diplomats and intelligence officials of an incident, ten years ago, involving North Korea. In mid-1998, American reconnaissance satellites photographed imagery of a major underground construction project at Kumchang-ri, twenty-five miles northwest of Yongbyon. "We were briefed that, without a doubt, this was a nuclear-related facility, and there was signals intelligence linking the construction brigade at Kumchang-ri to the nuclear complex at Yongbyon," the former State Department intelligence expert recalled.

Charles Kartman, who was President Bill Clinton's special envoy for peace talks with Korea, told me that the intelligence was considered a slam dunk by analysts in the Defense Intelligence Agency, even though other agencies disagreed. "We had a debate going on inside the community, but the D.I.A. unilaterally took it to Capitol Hill," Kartman said, forcing the issue and leading to a front-page *Times* story.

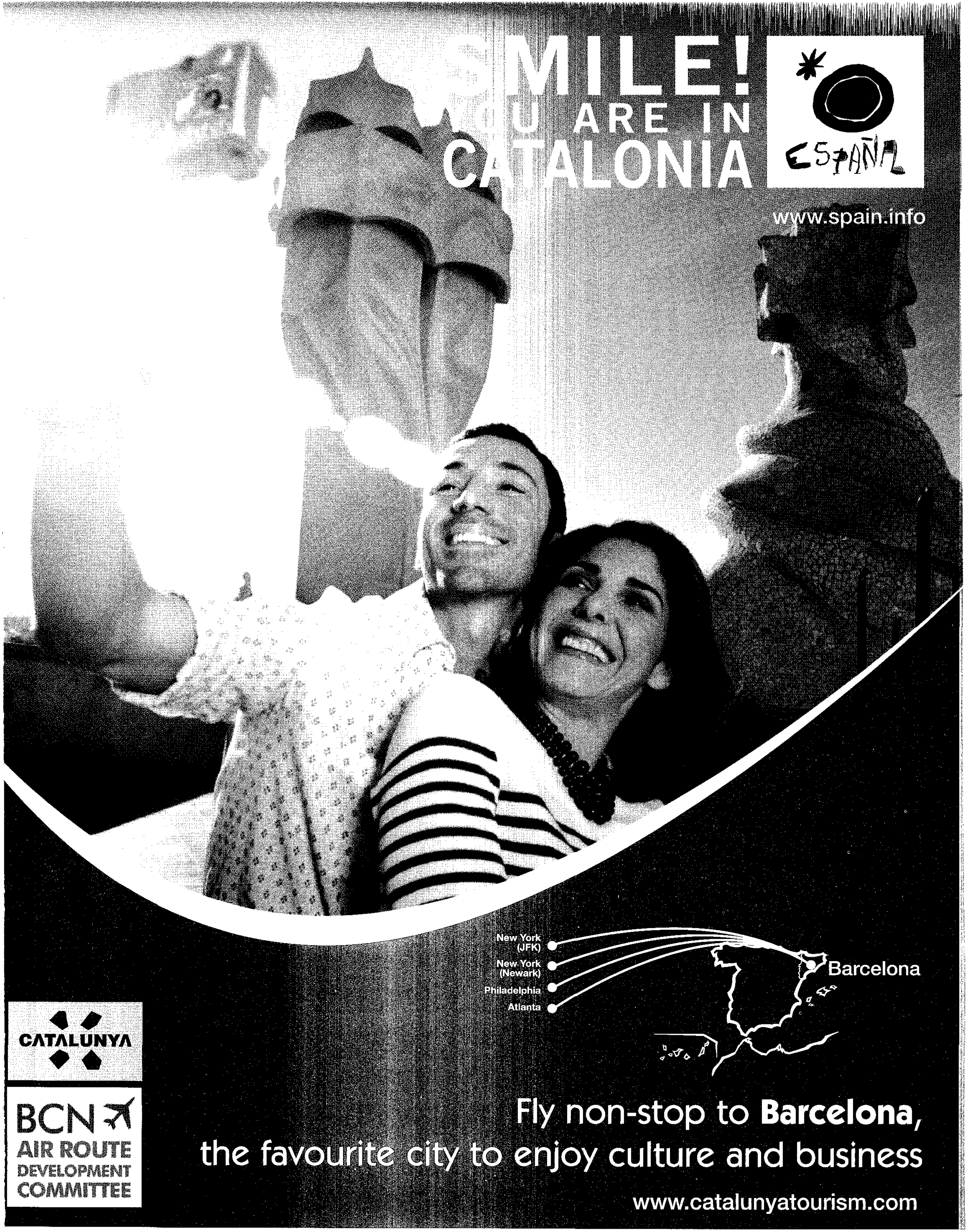
After months of negotiations, Kartman recalled, the North Koreans agreed, under diplomatic pressure, to grant access to Kumchang-ri. In return, they received aid, including assistance with a new potato-production program. Inspectors found little besides a series of empty tunnels. Robert Carlin, an expert on North Korea who retired in 2005 after serving more than thirty years with the C.I.A. and the State Department's intelligence bureau, told me that the Kumchang-ri incident highlighted "an endemic weakness" in the American intelligence community. "People think they know the ending and then they go back and find the evidence that fits their story," he said. "And then you get groupthink—and people reinforce each other."

It seems that, as with Kumchang-ri, there was a genuine, if not unanimous, belief by Israeli intelligence that the Syrians were constructing something that could have serious national-security consequences. But why would the Israelis take the risk of provoking a military response, and perhaps a war, if there was, as it seems, no smoking gun? Mohamed ElBaradei, expressing his frustration, said, "If a country has any information about a nuclear activity in another country, it should inform the I.A.E.A.—not bomb first and ask questions later."

One answer, suggested by David Al-



"Wow, you're right—this is hard."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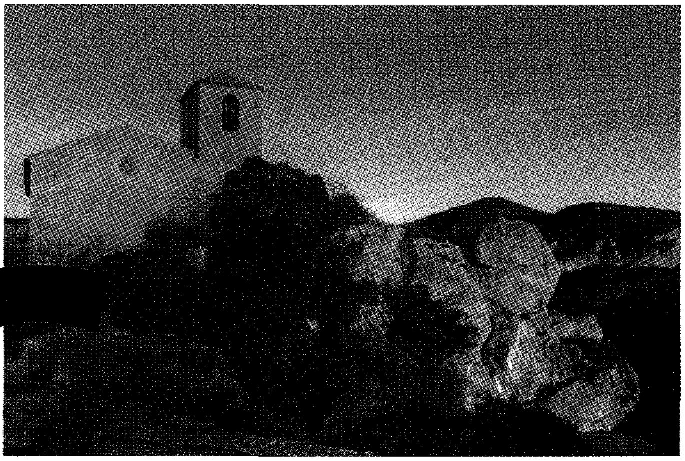

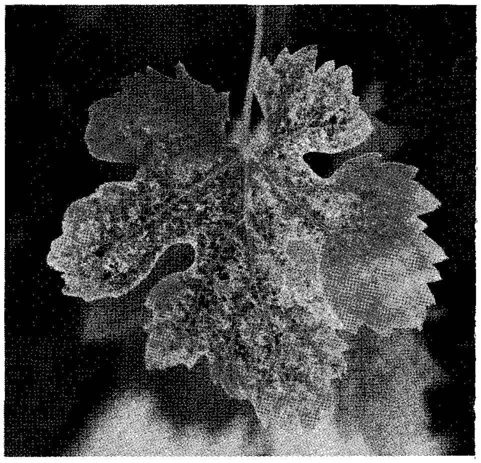

Catalonia's Southern Region

Set among mountainous terrain and captivating medieval towns, the wine district of **Priorat** is known for its rich, intense, world-class bottlings. The output is small for this dry, high-altitude district that defies mechanization. Its dramatic landscape seems to dwarf the prospects of the terraced Garnacha and Cariñena vines, which have to reach deep beneath the slate-rubbled surface to find sustenance.

In the early nineteen-eighties, intrepid winemakers saw the potential to revive the moribund vineyards that had first been planted around the monasteries built after the Christian conquest of the region in the twelfth century. The wineries are spread among eleven medieval villages about twenty-five miles inland from the coastal city of Tarragona, southwest of Barcelona. Tiny **Gratallops**, perched above the Siurana River, is the crossroads of the new wine trade, with prestigious bodegas (as the wineries are called) and rustic restaurants for sampling vintages with Catalan cuisine. Nearby is Scala Dei (founded in 1163), the Carthusian monastery—or priory, thus "Priorat"—where the vineyards began. Amid its ruins a winery was reborn in the nineteen-seventies and is open for tasting.

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Drive east from here to explore the narrow streets of cliffhanging **Siurana**, with its Moorish castle, and medieval-walled **Prades**. Then continue northeast to **Poblet**, where you will face the grandeur of the Cistercian Monastery of Santa María de Poblet. With its resident monks as guides, you can visit the huge wine cellar as well as tombs of the kings of Aragón dating to the twelfth century.

As a home base for this journey **Tarragona** promises both a wide choice of accommodations and an enological preview. An important outpost of the Roman Empire, the city was a center of the wine trade more than two millennia ago, when the Romans planted vineyards here and then shipped the wine back to Rome. Remains of that era include terra-cotta wine amphorae in the Museu Nacional Arqueològic as well as an amphitheatre and circus ruins.

About thirty miles east of Tarragona lies Catalonia's largest wine region, **Penedès**, where most of the country's *cava*, or sparkling wine, is produced. Stop in Vilafranca del Penedès to visit the wine museum, and tour the modernist landmark by Josep Puig i Cadafalch that houses the Codorníu cellars in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia. After this, choose your path: to the east *cava* awaits amid the conviviality of Barcelona, while to the northwest the vines that produce it flourish beneath the solemn and sacred gaze of the Montserrat mountains and their monastery.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: IGLESIA STA MARÍA, SIURANA ©JAVIER ALFARO GUILLEN; CARIÑENA VINE ©JOSE RAMON ISIEGAS GIL; PRIORAT WINES ©RICARD GINER I SARIOLA

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bright, is that Israel did not trust the international arms-control community. "I can understand the Israeli point of view, given the history with Iran and Algeria," Albright said. "Both nations had nuclear-weapons programs and, after being caught cheating, declared their reactors to be civil reactors, for peacetime use. The international groups, like the U.N. and the I.A.E.A, never shut them down." Also, Israel may have calculated that risk of a counterattack was low: President Assad would undoubtedly conclude that the attack had the support of the Bush Administration and, therefore, that any response by Syria would also engage the U.S. (My conversations with officials in Syria bore out this assumption.)

In Tel Aviv, the senior Israeli official pointedly told me, "Syria still thinks Hezbollah won the war in Lebanon"—referring to the summer, 2006, fight between Israel and the Shiite organization headed by Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah. "Nasrallah knows how much that war cost—one-third of his fighters were killed, infrastructure was bombed, and ninety-five per cent of his strategic weapons were wiped out," the Israeli official said. "But Assad has a Nasrallah complex and thinks Hezbollah won. And, 'If he did it, I can do it.' This led to an adventurous mood in Damascus. Today, they are more sober."

That notion was echoed by the ambassador of an Israeli ally who is posted in Tel Aviv. "The truth is not important," the ambassador told me. "Israel was able to restore its credibility as a deterrent. That is the whole thing. No one will know what the real story is."

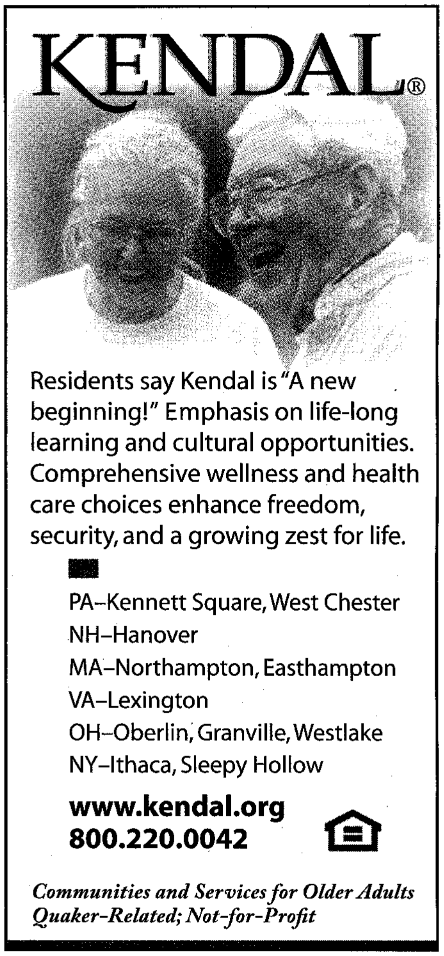
There is evidence that the preëmptive raid on Syria was also meant as a warning about—and a model for—a preëmptive attack on Iran. When I visited Israel this winter, Iran was the overriding concern among political and defense officials I spoke to—not Syria. There was palpable anger toward Washington, in the wake of a National Intelligence Estimate that concluded, on behalf of the American intelligence community, that Iran is not now constructing a nuclear weapon. Many in Israel view Iran's nuclear ambitions as an existential threat; they believe that military action against Iran may be inevitable, and worry that America may not be there when needed. The N.I.E. was published in November, after a yearlong standoff involving Cheney's office, which resisted the report's findings. At the time of the raid, reports about the forthcoming N.I.E. and its general conclusion had already appeared.

Retired Major General Giora Eiland, who served as the national-security adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, told me, "The Israeli military takes it as an assumption that one day we will need to have a military campaign against Iran, to slow and eliminate the nuclear option." He added, "Whether the political situation will allow this is another question."

In the weeks after the N.I.E.'s release, Bush insisted that the Iranian nuclear-weapons threat was as acute as ever, a theme he amplified during his nine-day Middle East trip after the New Year. "A lot of people heard that N.I.E. out here and said that George Bush and the Americans don't take the Iranian threat seriously," he told Greta Van Susteren, of Fox News. "And so this trip has been successful from the perspective of saying . . . we will keep the pressure on."

Shortly after the bombing, a Chinese envoy and one of the Bush Administration's senior national-security officials met in Washington. The Chinese envoy had just returned from a visit to Tehran, a person familiar with the discussion told me, and he wanted the White House to know that there were moderates there who were interested in talks. The national-security official rejected that possibility and told the envoy, as the person familiar with the discussion recalled, "'You are aware of the recent Israeli statements about Syria. The Israelis are extremely serious about Iran and its nuclear program, and I believe that, if the United States government is unsuccessful in its diplomatic dealings with Iran, the Israelis will take it out militarily.' He then told the envoy that he wanted him to convey this to his government—that the Israelis were serious.

"He was telling the Chinese leadership that they'd better warn Iran that we can't hold back Israel, and that the Iranians should look at Syria and see what's coming next if diplomacy fails," the person familiar with the discussion said. "His message was that the Syrian attack was in part aimed at Iran." ♦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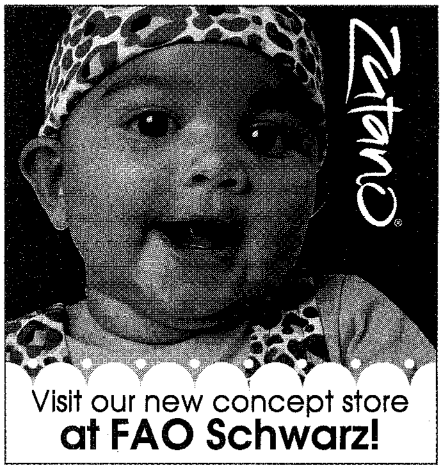
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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

EERILY COMPOSED

Nico Muhly's sonic magic.

BY REBECCA MEAD

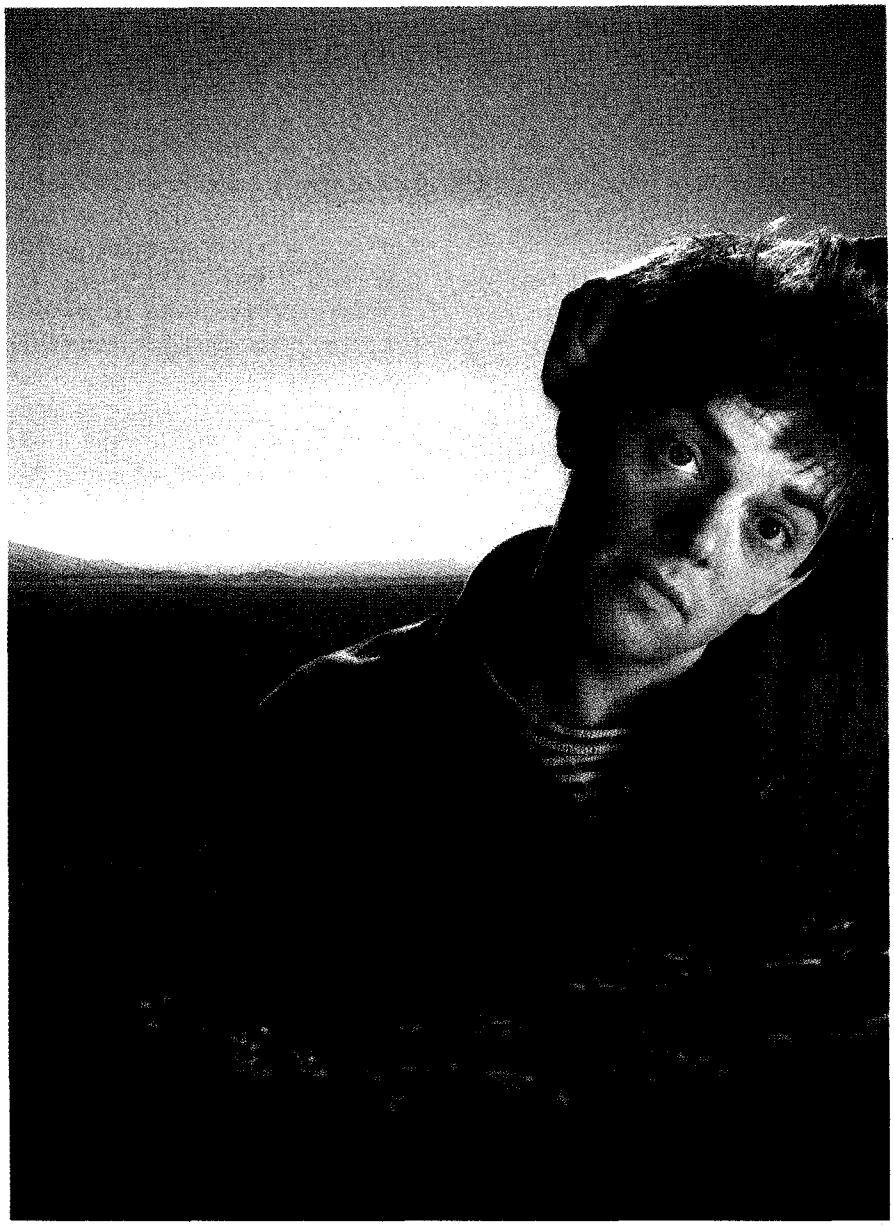
Nico Muhly, a composer, was bounding through Chinatown, his hands thrust into the pockets of a black jacket, and a too small Icelandic knitted cap pulled halfway down over his ears, heading for the market under the Manhattan Bridge. Muhly, who is twenty-six, had a violin concerto that needed writing, but he also had a pot of Bolognese sauce that needed cooking. Negotiating his neighborhood like a Parisian matron, Muhly bought ground beef from one butcher and two kinds of pork, lean and fatty, from another. He bought a head of celery and, for good measure, some ducks' feet to use in making stock.

Muhly learned to cook as a child, and he finds the alchemy of the kitchen consonant with the composer's art. His own kitchen is in a modestly appointed loft on the sixth floor of a building sandwiched between two storefronts on Division Street. The apartment, which Muhly shares with a roommate, Liz Gately, who has been his best friend since high school, has aged plank floors, single-glazed windows, and a gas heater mounted on a wall perilously close to a coat hook; white Christmas lights, strung along the walls, provide illumination. On one side, the loft overlooks a rooftop day-care playground. At intervals, the apartment fills with the sound of urgent, piping voices, and little heads can be seen bobbing up and down just beyond the foldout couch.

Returning home, Muhly shed his jacket and started chopping garlic. He is tall, and has the wholesome good looks of the nice one in a boy band, with wide-set eyes, a trace of freckles, and dark spiky hair that, even by day, sometimes bears a dusting of the glittery makeup that he wears to certain performances. He turned to the stove and started sautéing ground beef and onions. English choral music played on his laptop.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English composers of religious music, in particular William Byrd and John Taverner, are among Muhly's chief influences, though he also draws musical inspiration from the spare repetitions of Philip Glass and Steve Reich and from the off-kilter rhythms of songs by Björk, whose recordings he has worked on. "Quiet Music," a solo for piano by Muhly and played by him on his début CD, "Speaks Volumes," which was released a year and a half ago, has the haunting, fragmentary quality of an anthem heard from stone church steps through heavy ecclesiastical doors. Another piece on the album, "Keep in Touch," is a duet between a swooning viola—recorded with alarming intimacy, so that the scrape of bow on string is bared like a scar—and the aching vocalizations of Antony Hegarty, the lead singer of the indie band Antony and the Johnsons. "He paints the sky with his work," says Hegarty, who appeared with Muhly last year at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, in a concert of his own songs, which Muhly helped arrange for the Brooklyn Philharmonic. "The melody and notes are almost invisible, and he thinks in terms of these panoramas of shifting energy, which at their best are so beautiful."

Philip Glass, for whom Muhly has worked since his sophomore year of college, at Columbia, says that he finds in Muhly "a curious ear, a restless listening, and a maker of works. He's doing his own thing." (Although Muhly is much in demand as a composer in his own right, he still has a day job, which includes feeding Glass's film-music manuscripts into a computer program that can play the scores.) Following the model of Glass, Muhly prefers to have his work performed as often as possible, and in as many different contexts as possible, rather than refining his compositions within the academy. In the past year, American Ballet Theatre staged a ballet, "From Here on Out," on which Muhly collaborated with Benjamin Millepied; the Boston Pops premièred his composition "Wish You Were Here"; and he made his Car-



Muhly's eclecticism is facilitated by Google and iTunes. Photograph by Josef Astor.

negie Hall début as a composer, when a program of his works, which he paired with Renaissance choral music, was performed in Zankel Hall. "In the classical world, it's, like, bad, or too popular, to produce a lot, but you learn such a lot by listening to a piece and, literally, not being able to stop it," Muhly told me. "It feels to me more like food, in that sense. People need to eat. You may as well make them something to eat."

Just as, thirty years ago, Glass and his peers experimented with new modes of performance—"Einstein on the Beach" lasted five hours without intermission, during which the audience was invited to wander in and out—Muhly has an easy familiarity with contemporary media and an openness to being heard through novel means. He recorded "Speaks Volumes" with Valgeir Sigurðsson, an Icelandic musician and producer best known for his work with Björk, and released the album on Sigurðsson's label, Bedroom Community, rather than on a traditional classical label. (Muhly's second CD, "Mothertongue," which he also recorded with Sigurðsson, will be released in May.) Muhly makes some of his recordings available on his Web site, Nicomuhly.com, and on his MySpace page. "People five years older than me are always deeply confused about what MySpace actually is, and people five years younger are deeply into it, but people my age are, like, 'Yes, this is essentially where pedophiles are, and there is also music there,' " he says.

"I am convinced right now that anyone who is doing stuff that I just adore—I am going to wind up having access to it, whether through a commercial enterprise or through the Internet," Muhly says. "There are people who don't need the traditional structure of 'I heard this concert,' or 'I heard it on NPR.' " He can be similarly ecumenical about the distribution of his own time and energy. In the past several years, thanks to his work with Sigurðsson, Muhly has spent a great deal of time in Iceland, and has become a proficient student of the language, an avid user of Reykjavík's municipal geothermal bathing facilities, and a connoisseur of local delicacies such as puffin-meat tidbits wrapped in bacon. Last year, the members of an Icelandic rock group asked him to write them some choral arrangements—but the only recompense they could offer, they said, was to make him a mojito. Given the expense of foodstuffs in Reykjavík, where so much is imported, this was a large gesture. "The limes and mint—that must have cost them a hundred dollars," Muhly, who was only too happy to oblige, says.

When Muhly composes, the last thing he thinks about is the actual notes that musicians will play. He begins with books and documents, YouTube videos and illuminated manuscripts. He meditates on this material, digesting its ironies and appreciating its aesthetics. Meanwhile, he devises an emotional scheme for the piece—the journey on which he intends to lead his listener. Muhly believes that some composers of new music rely too heavily on program notes to give their work a coherence that it might lack in the actual listening. "This stupid conceptual stuff where it's, like, 'I was really inspired by, like, Morse Code and the AIDS crisis,' " he says. Even so, his own work is informed by his extra-musical interests and obsessions. "Wonders," a track on "Mothertongue," includes the ethereal voice of Helgi Hrafn Jónsson, an Icelandic performer, singing fragments in English from "The Travels of Sir John Mandeville"; a sonnet about sea monsters, composed by King James I; and a 1619 complaint against Thomas Weelkes, the composer and organist at Chichester Cathedral, for his repeated drunkenness. "The Only Tune," also on "Mothertongue," is another Muhly collage—a dismantled traditional English song about a violent sororicide, delivered with affecting flatness by an American

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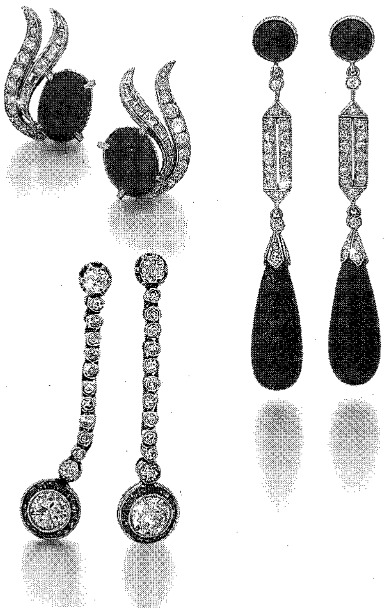

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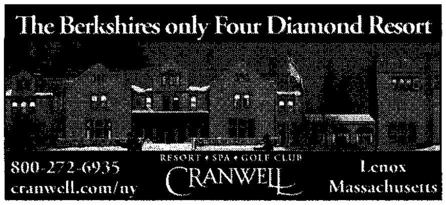

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folk singer named Sam Amidon, to the accompaniment, variously, of a sampled Farfisa organ similar to that used by Philip Glass in "Music in Twelve Parts," a pair of butcher's knives scraping against each other, a recording of whistling Icelandic wind, and the sound of raw whale flesh slopping around a bowl.

Muhly's violin concerto, which was commissioned by the Aurora Orchestra—a new, young British ensemble that specializes in modern music—and was to be performed at the Royal Academy of Music, in London, is based largely on Renaissance astronomy, though it also has roots in educational videos about the solar system of the sort shown in schools in the nineteen-eighties. (One day, Muhly e-mailed me a link to a YouTube video featuring the resonant voice of Carl Sagan giving a tour of the constellations.) For this piece, Muhly had been contemplating, among other documents, a diagram of the universe dating from 1576 and taken from a book by Thomas Digges, an English proponent of the theories of Copernicus: it showed a series of concentric circles, the innermost one representing the sun and the outer one representing "the pallace of foelicitye garnished with perpetuall shininge glorious lightes innumerable." Another inspiration was an engraving from a treatise about sunspots by the Jesuit astronomer Christoph Scheiner. The pathos of the Renaissance astronomer's situation appeals to Muhly, and speaks to the composer's task of creating emotional resonance through the mathematical arrangement of notes. "In the Renaissance, everyone was trying to negotiate a relationship with the divine," he explains. "And there is an inherent emotional content to scientific studies, even though science is supposed to be divorced from that."

Muhly has an associative intelligence that is facilitated by Google and iTunes. The image from Digges reminded him of an anthem by William Harris that sets part of a poem by Edmund Spenser ("Fair is the heaven where happy souls have place / In full enjoyment of felicity"), and that prompted him to listen again to a recording of Elizabethan minstrel songs by the countertenor Alfred Deller. Looking at a series of images of the sun marked by sunspots—which reminded him of a computer screen cluttered with icons—he thought of a passage from Roland Barthes's "The Empire of Signs," in which Barthes says that a chopstick "introduces into the use of food not an order but a caprice, a certain indolence." Muhly decided that "a certain indolence" might be a good characterization of the mood with which he wanted his violin concerto to conclude.

Muhly usually composes on sheets of manuscript paper, though sometimes he also uses an electronic keyboard, which sits on his desk next to two large computer monitors. One afternoon when I was watching him at work, one screen displayed two pages of a score, and the other showed his e-mail inbox and several open instant-message chats with friends. (Muhly does not require silence or seclusion while working and, in addition to conducting multiple online conversations while composing, often has several online games of Scrabble under way.) The section of the concerto that he was working on was inspired, in part, by another image: a stage design by Karl Friedrich Schinkel for an 1816 production of "The Magic Flute," in which the realm of the Queen of the Night was represented by a midnight-blue dome studded with stars spaced at regular intervals, like the inside of an inverted colander.

Muhly's concerto, which was for an electric violin accompanied by a chamber orchestra, was to be a nocturne of sorts. "Mozart is so good at pre-Romantic notions of the night," he says. "We all know Mahler, but with Mozart you get this kind of evening-y thing, with an awareness of light and space." Muhly had also been thinking about Mozartian articulation for his concerto: "There is the possibility, in Mozart's music, that there are all these little moving parts that you can make a very big deal out of, if you want to." Although Muhly's composition would sound nothing like Mozart, it was to have its own little moving parts: a series of eleven chords that would eventually be sorted into a harmonious whole—much as Christoph Scheiner and Thomas Digges, in their observations of the night skies, fashioned godly order from apparent chaos.

A message from a friend popped up on Muhly's second screen, asking him if he had read an essay by Bernard Holland in the *Times* about the impact of first hearing "Einstein on the Beach." Holland had written a curmudgeonly review of Muhly's Carnegie Hall concert, declaring himself unable to see the connection between the older works and the newer. ("He reviewed the show as if I were having a dinner party and he'd showed up in the middle of it," Muhly told me.)

" 'Einstein'—changing old people's lives since 1976," Muhly typed back, and turned again to his music.

In early November, about two months before the violin concerto was to be performed, Muhly flew to London to meet with Thomas Gould, the soloist, and Nicholas Collon, Aurora's director and conductor. The meeting took place at Gould's flat, on the creaking top floor of a dilapidated mansion not far from Regent's Park. Gould, who is twenty-four, and who had floppy light-brown hair and an unshaven chin, sat on a sea-green Naugahyde couch that had been draped with a raw-cotton sheet, the electric violin on his lap plugged into an amplifier by his feet. Collon, who is also twenty-four, sat on the floor in jeans and a baggy knitted sweater, a blue sock on one foot and a gray one on the other. The floorboards sagged under a grubby carpet that, when Muhly walked across the room, gave slightly underfoot, like the barely cooked crust of a pudding.

"I have some notes for you," Muhly said excitedly, pulling a few pages of music manuscript from his leather satchel and handing them to Gould, who was playing with the controls of his electric violin. When Gould pressed a foot pedal, a tinny, Casio-style drumbeat started up. "I haven't played it for a while," Gould said apologetically, hurrying to quash the sound.

"Does it have a bossa-nova beat?" Muhly joked.

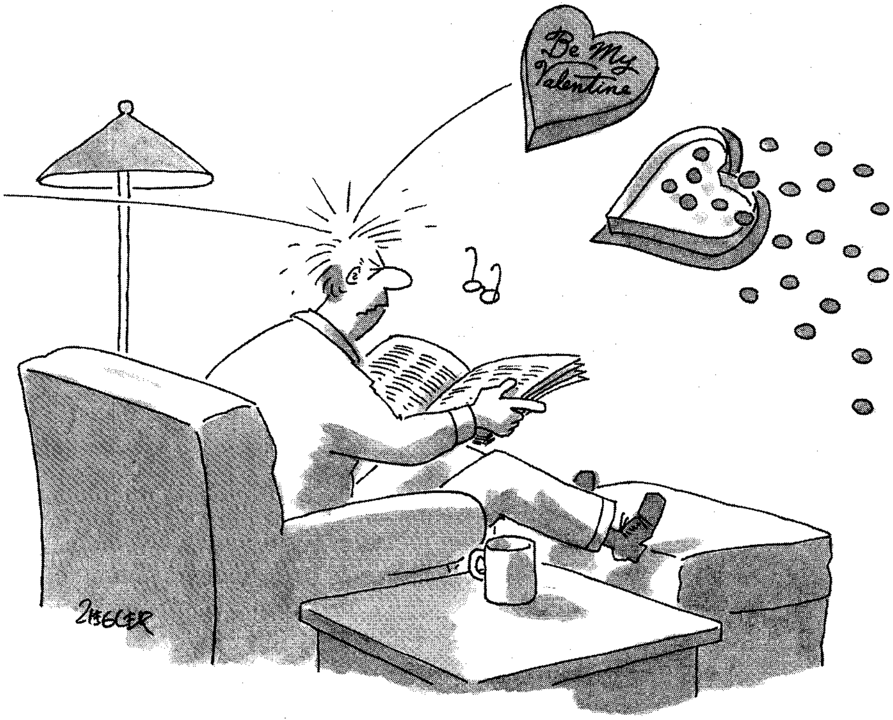
Once the machine had been tamed, Muhly asked Gould to experiment with some different techniques: grating the bow to snarl the grace notes at the beginning of phrases; bouncing the bow across the strings to create an aural ricochet; pressing the foot pedal after each phrase to build up layers of sound, one upon another.

"Now I want it slower, and super Brahmsy," Muhly said, and Gould drew the bow slowly over the strings, until the room was filled with the violin's keening.

"It's so eighties!" Muhly said. "Like David Bowie!"

"All we need now is a crystal disco ball," Collon said, with pleasure.

Muhly's personal experience of the eighties involved more sandboxes than discos: he was born in 1981, to Bunny Harvey, an artist, and Frank Muhly, a filmmaker. Nico was an only child. "One was the absolute border of how many kids my parents were going to have," he says. It was an unconventional childhood: the Muhlys split their time be-



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tween an eighteenth-century farmhouse in the tiny town of Tunbridge, Vermont, and a house in Providence, Rhode Island, convenient for a teaching job that Harvey secured at Wellesley. His parents' work sometimes took the family overseas: when Nico was seven, they spent several weeks living near an archeological site outside Luxor, in Egypt. (Nico's strongest recollection is of being chased by a pack of wild dogs.) In Vermont, they grew their own produce and slaughtered their own sheep, at the end of the yard. "My mother is the only person anyone knows who will eat all the nasty stuff," Muhly says. "When the neighbors kill a deer, they call and tell her where they did the field dressing, and she goes in the middle of the night and grabs the heart."

A MEASURING WORM

This yellow striped green
Caterpillar, climbing up
The steep window screen,

Constantly (for lack
Of a full set of legs) keeps
Humping up his back.

It's as if he sent
By a sort of semaphore
Dark omegas meant

To warn of Last Things.
Although he doesn't know it,
He will soon have wings,

And I, too, don't know
Toward what undreamt condition
Inch by inch I go.

—*Richard Wilbur*

Muhly says that he learned early that his mother's commitment to her work was inviolate, and that her experience of motherhood was not without ambivalence. "Sometimes she would look at me and be mystified by the object of me," he says. When Muhly was about three, Harvey painted his portrait; in it, he stands, blond and serious-looking, in a field, peering through tall grasses, next to the ghostly outline of an erased maternal figure. The painting is called "Evil Nico."

Muhly has a fond, if still somewhat fraught, relationship with his mother, who, along with his father, attended a celebratory dinner for about forty of Muhly's friends at the Fuleen Seafood Restaurant, in Chinatown, after a performance of Muhly's ballet at American Ballet Theatre. Muhly went from table to table, showing off a congratulatory gift from his mother: a life-size, lifelike model of a crow, paired with a candle in the shape of a pinecone. "She said you can light the candle and have the crow look at it, or you can light the candle under the crow," he explained with glee.

"You know how crows and magpies and blue jays are the juvenile delinquents of the air? I see Nico pulling things out of the air," Harvey told me later, explaining the gift. "I wouldn't say Nico is a thief, but he is greedy for information and possibility." Harvey recalls that, as an infant, Muhly imitated birdsong and animal sounds. She says, "When he was a toddler, I would read to him in bed, and he would be poking my leg with his finger and saying, 'Fast forward, please,' as if I were some mechanical device that could be encouraged to get to the point." (Muhly retains a similar habit, when listening to music, of rapping a finger in time upon the shoulder, arm, or leg of whoever happens to be sitting or standing closest to him.)

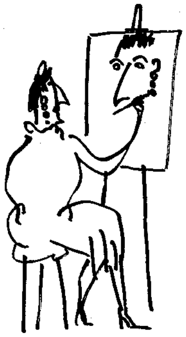
When he was eight years old, Muhly began to learn the piano, on an old upright in the basement of the Rhode Island house, but it was not until a friend at school invited him to join a church choir that his musical affinities truly began to emerge. "My mother was horrified: she would come and hear us sing, but grudgingly," Muhly says. (His mother is half Jewish, and his father comes from a Lutheran family; both are more likely to celebrate the solstice than any Judeo-Christian religious observance.) Muhly, however, loved the repertory of Byrd, Weelkes, and Orlando Gibbons. "I found myself immediately at home in it musically," he says. "I was really entranced by early music, and how the lines worked. It felt so much more emotional than the Romantic stuff I was playing as a pianist—Chopin, or Schumann, or Tchaikovsky, which always felt sort of Hallmarky."

Muhly started to play the organ in addition to the piano; one day when he was ten, his mother took him to Trinity Church, in Boston, where she knew the assistant organist. Harvey recalls, "He introduced Nico to the music director, who tried to play for him a medley of music from 'Fantasia,' and Nico rolled his eyes. Then the music director asked if he would like to play something. He sat down and his feet couldn't even reach the pedals. He said, 'I am going to play some Bach,' and this big sound came roaring out of the organ. There were all these people taking a tour of the church who were saying, 'Who's playing?,' because he was only four feet tall." That afternoon, Harvey recalls, Muhly started composing his first piece of music, a setting of a Kyrie for choir, on a napkin at a coffee shop in Harvard Square. "He wrote it vertically—all the parts simultaneously," she says. "He was thinking in chords, rather than in individual lines. He said, 'That's how I hear it.'" Frank Muhly says, "It was like birdsong that's innate—something triggers it and it comes out full blown."

Muhly says that, even as a boy, he was fascinated by the emotional function of church music as opposed to that of concert music. "Church music is more directional music, pointing upward," he says. "And the satisfaction of a job well done is the only one you are going to get. When you finish the piece, you don't look at the audience and smile; you don't graciously bow. And the composer vanishes, too, in addition to the performers. If you are really good, you disappear."

Muhly did not exactly vanish as a choirboy, his choirmaster, Mark Johnson, recalls. "He was somewhat irreverent toward the religious aspects of our work," Johnson says. "He put out a publication for the choir called 'The Society of the Twisted Cross' that would twist around some of the texts we were singing, and would sometimes be very descriptive of members of the choir." Muhly assisted Johnson by doing computer transcriptions of the singers' parts, to which he made his own emendations. "He was very anti-God at the time, and he would always lower-case the 'g,' like e. e. cummings," Johnson says.

Since moving to New York, seven years ago, Muhly has regularly attended St. Thomas Church, on Fifth Avenue at Fifty-third Street. In 2005, he composed a "Bright Mass with Canons" for its choir. "The organ writing is very colorful and very brilliant, and what is so attractive to me is that he is using ancient techniques," John Scott, the director of music at St. Thomas, says. "Canon, where voices imitate each other and sing the same music but not at the same time, came to its fruition among early-sixteenth-century Flemish composers. Nico Muhly is in a sense coming from there, but it is dressed up in a very contemporary musical language that has aspects of minimalism."



Muhly's youthful anti-clericalism has been tempered by time: though Scott told me that he and Muhly have never discussed questions of faith, he added, "I suspect that he is quite serious about it." Muhly told me, "I *am* quite serious about church music. Musicians have always enjoyed a 'question-free zone' about faith, because religious music can help people explore their relationship with the divine, which I think is a much more powerful altruistic act than making a big scene of your own personal relationship. I started going to St. Thomas here, and it wasn't even a question for a second that I wanted to live a life that includes liturgical music as a major part."

Muhly's command of the English religious-music tradition informs his non-liturgical compositions, too, if sometimes rather impishly. When I joined him one day at his office at Philip Glass's studio—he works in a soundproofed interior room surrounded by high-end digital equipment, a few packages of dried seafood from Chinatown tacked to a corkboard for color—he was working on a section of his violin concerto, writing parts for the marimba, the strings, and the piano. "Now, if you want to make it really godlike, here's what you do," he said, and keyed in a few throbbing bass notes. "There is a specific way the bass works that makes the English go crazy," he explained. "It's like catnip for them, so I try to take advantage of it. I love a good nineteenth-century national stereotype. It is really useful in composition."

When pressed, Muhly describes himself as "a nonbeliever, but with cheating." He says, "I feel an enormous attraction to the liturgy, to the tradition. On a certain level, going through rituals and living a year with an awareness of a liturgical calendar, as I have at St. Thomas, is really, really amazing—mapping out a year with respect to that is a super-interesting thing to do. For me, it is culturally bizarre that it should happen to be High Anglicanism. But that is where the music is."

When Muhly was thirteen, his mother was a visiting artist at the American Academy in Rome for six months, and he went along with her. The experience, he says, was life-changing: "I wanted desperately to go to the British boarding school with the uniforms, but my mother was, like, uh-uh, so I went to Italian public school, which was such a zoo, with every chaotic stereotype you can imagine: it was in this Fascist building, and everyone was fighting each other all the time." (Bunny Harvey, who points out her son's propensity for narrative embroidery, insists that it was actually Muhly's idea to attend public school.) "I was mad at my mother for so long, and then my Italian got really good really fast, and I stopped hating my mother, and the possibility of joy reëntered my life."

At the academy, there was an unused

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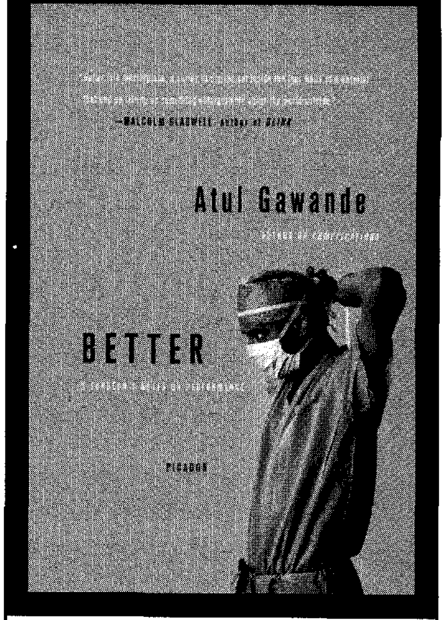

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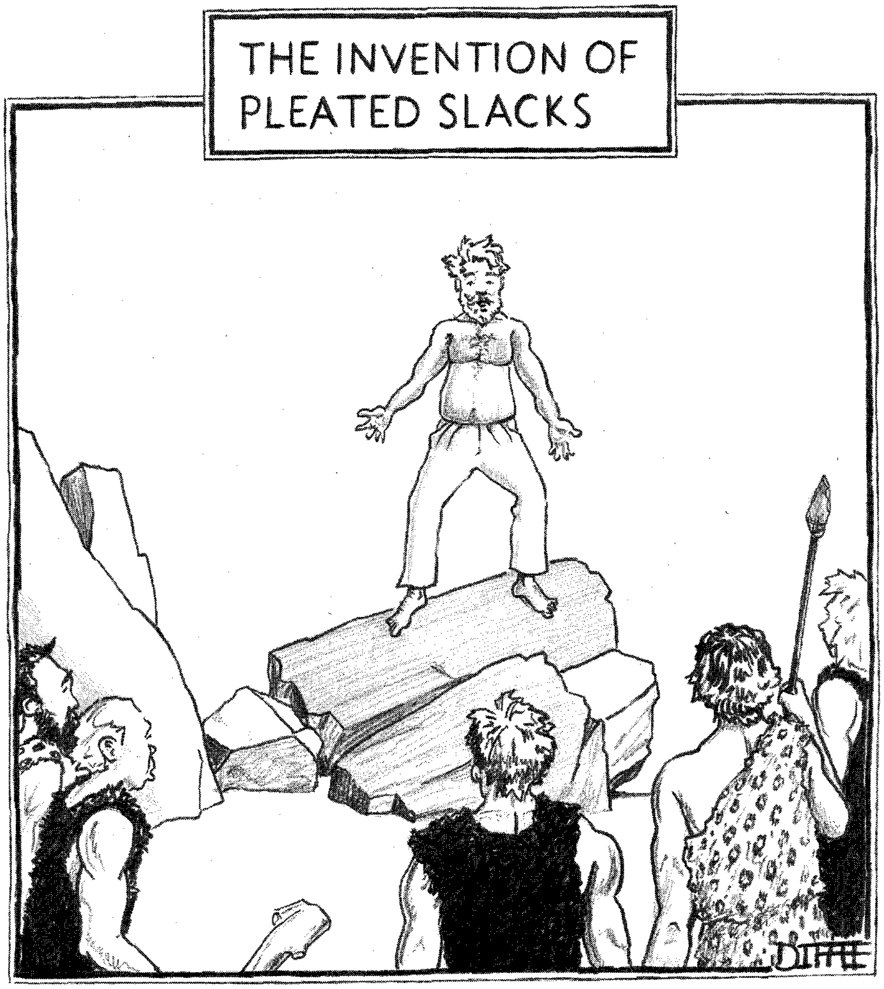
studio equipped with a piano; Muhly was allowed to take over the space. "The community at the academy took him seriously," Harvey says. "People loved talking to him, and he realized that there wasn't such a difference between being an intelligent kid and being a fully fledged creative person." Among the people he made friends with were Maira Kalman, the illustrator and author, and the late Tibor Kalman, the graphic designer. "I had met Bunny and had heard her talking about her son, but without really paying attention," Maira Kalman says. "Then Tibor and I walked past his studio and heard him playing, and it was extraordinary." (Two years ago, Muhly collaborated with Kalman on a whimsical operatic interpretation of "The Elements of Style," the language-usage manual, which was performed in the Rose Main Reading Room, at the New York Public Library.) In Rome, Muhly developed an obsession with the bus system, and would ride the buses for hours after school, exploring the city. "In the period of time when my language was really good, when I had Italian friends, when I had my bus pass, I was, like, if this is what life can be like, given certain conditions, let's aim for this in the future," Muhly says.

He attended high school in Providence. Kenneth Clauser, his high-school adviser, first came across him when a French teacher reported that one of her sixth graders would be missing a class because he had to play the organ for a wedding. He recalls that Muhly led a group known to the teachers as the Grammar Patrol: "They would patrol the campus and correct the grammar on the signage. He was a stickler about expression." Muhly also took a leading role in directing the music for theatrical productions, including "Fiddler on the Roof" and "Bye Bye Birdie," into which he inserted sections of Stravinsky's "Petrushka" and "The Firebird," and selections from Abba.

In his final years of high school, Muhly studied composition with David Rakowski, a professor at Brandeis, and he worked his way obsessively through the contents of Wellesley's music library, absorbing the works of Steve Reich and other minimalists. "I got hold of Reich's 'Music for Eighteen Musicians' somehow, and I had an immediate visceral and emotional reaction to the repetition and pattern-making," he says. "It sounded so much like how my head worked." At fourteen, he attended a summer program at Tanglewood. The fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi, whom Muhly had met through the Kalmans, held a musicale in his New York apartment to raise money for Muhly to go to Tanglewood; one of the guests was the choreographer Mark Morris. (Muhly has a gift for acquaintance: "More people have met me than have heard what I do, and I am working to change that," he says.) Mizrahi recalls, "Nico played Stravinsky's piano version of 'Petrushka,' and jaws dropped. Then he said, 'I am going to play one of my own compositions. I don't usually do this kind of thing, because I'm not a trained monkey, so I'm going to do this once, and you had better listen.' "


THE INVENTION OF PLEATED SLACKS
DIFFEE

"Wheel, schmeel—check these babies out!"

At eighteen, Muhly enrolled in a joint program at Columbia, where he studied English, and Juilliard, where he got a master's in composition. Columbia's core curriculum includes a music-appreciation course, which students can test out of. On the afternoon the test was held, Muhly, who by then had begun working part-time for Philip Glass, was due to fly to London to work on Glass's film score for "The Hours." "It was a two-hour test, and there was an hour of listening and an hour of multiple choice," Muhly recalls. "I thought, The only way I can do this is if I can get out in an hour and ten minutes, so I will have to do the listening as fast as I can and hope for the best. In the listening part, you had to write down as much as you could about what you had heard, so you could write, 'Oh, it sounds like Baroque music.' But you could also write, 'That's Bach's Third French Suite, it's Glenn Gould's recording, God damn it, can I please go to England now?' " Muhly passed the test and made his flight.

At Columbia, Muhly shared a sprawling faculty apartment with an astrophysics student named Will Serber, whose late father, Robert Serber, was a physics

“Me? I represent the besieged.”

professor who had worked on the Manhattan Project. “I get the impression he lived there partly because it was a good story,” Serber, who remains Muhly’s close friend, told me. “I remember at some point he owed me twenty dollars, and he returned it to me all in singles in inconvenient places. I would go and take a shower, and a dollar bill would emerge from my shampoo bottle.” Muhly took Edward Said’s course on the history of the novel, and studied Arabic. At Juilliard, where he was studying with the composers Christopher Rouse and John Corigliano, Muhly was unusually productive. “He would bring in thirty or forty pages of music a week, and if twenty-five of them didn’t work out he would have no problem with that,” Corigliano says. “We worked on structure, but the skill of writing virtuosically for winds, brass, percussion, strings—he came in the door with that.” Muhly formed alliances with a number of musicians who have become regular collaborators, including Nadia Sirota, a violist. Sirota says of Muhly, “He is different from a lot of composers his age in that he prefers a kind of old-school way of approaching string playing, from the style of the forties and fifties, with lots of vibrato, and very romantic.”

Philip Glass told me, “The great anxiety among young composers is, when are you going to hear your own voice? But the real problem is, how do you get rid of it, how do you develop? Nico hasn’t got to that yet. There is a lot of rapid growth in one’s twenties, but the big challenge is to keep that alive over the long stretch, for the next forty years, and not let it get stifled by the meanness of the world we live in.” John Adams, who curated the Zankel Hall series in which Muhly’s work appeared last year, says that Muhly’s music is “eclectic, nondenominational in the world of contemporary classical music, which tends to split off into lots of different orthodoxies. He obviously shows influences from the minimalist composers, but his music is not nearly as rigorously designed. It is very much like him: it is open, it is attractive, it is pleasing.” Adams says that he hears his own influence on Muhly’s work—“It’s like meeting a twenty-year-old who looks strangely familiar, only to discover he’s your long-lost son”—but adds that he finds it oddly untroubled. “I could use a little more edge, or a little more violence,” Adams says. “At times, there is a surfeit of prettiness in Nico’s music, and I am not sure it is a good thing for someone so young to be so concerned with attractiveness.”

“That is a criticism I have of myself all the time, too,” Muhly told me. “Why does everything have to be so beautiful all the time? It’s like going into someone’s apartment and asking, ‘Why does everything have to be a beautiful object? You people suck.’ ” Muhly points out that “Mothertongue,” the new recording, is much less sweet, filled with jittery, anxious repetitions and jarring chords that are intended to suggest the nauseating atmosphere of international jet lag and airport stultification, along with more mundane domestic anxieties. For the title track, Muhly layered the voice of Abigail Fischer, a mezzo-soprano, singing all the addresses at which she has ever lived on top of recordings of another friend taking a shower, eating toast, and frying an egg.

The prettiness of Muhly’s music is, in any case, not unconsidered. “There is a way to get away with writing music these days that is like making big, abstract paintings without ever learning to draw a piece of fruit or a landscape,” he says. “There exists a lingua franca of classical music that is just indiscriminately ugly. And so when I was in school I set out to get involved in learning how to write beautiful textures, just to see what that was like, because no one would ever tell you how to really space out a chord. So all the stuff on ‘Speaks Volumes’ is very pretty on purpose, just to say you can do this and still have it be meaningful and have emotional content. If there is an emotional depth to my stuff, it is always from a weird place of repetitions lulling you into a sense of security and then taking it away, so it’s a perversion of what you expect; or something being so pretty and so saccharine that you wonder if it’s witch’s candy.” One such unsettling moment occurs in “It Goes Without Saying,” the second track on “Speaks Volumes,” when the sound of woody, beeping clarinets is gradually overcome by threatening digital noise.

Muhly politely cavils at Adams’s suggestion that youth should indicate anger. “When one’s twenties were spent in 1968—yes, you probably were pretty angry about things,” he says, referring, in part, to the fierce partisanship that characterized the New York classical-music scene at the time, with academicians and critics advocating a rigorous complexity while an oppositional aesthetic, minimal-

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ism, was emerging downtown. "But I think in my twenties I am just more hyperaware and hypersensitive," Muhly says. "If I am going to talk about angry, I will do it in a really reserved way. I will do it like in the Passions, where you get the crowd saying, 'Crucify him,' and it is always so gorgeous. I don't have it in me to write music about an emotion I don't innately have."

Obsession, anxiety, and loneliness are, however, omnipresent in Muhly's work, even when his music seems, on the surface, most eager to please. "Wish You Were Here," which Muhly composed for the Boston Pops, is expressive and romantic, an orchestral impression of the exotic strains of traditional Balinese gamelan music. Muhly's invocation of the gamelan calls to mind Benjamin Britten, who incorporated gamelan music into "Death in Venice" and other works after travelling to Bali and being inspired by the beauty of the music, and by the beauty of the youthful musicians playing it. "If I am speaking to other composers, Britten is one," Muhly says. "I'm saying, 'You can have this, and it doesn't have to be a secret, shameful thing—this influence, this exoticism.' " Britten is a significant figure in Muhly's musical—and social—imagination. "Britten's music is important to Nico, but I think Britten's loneliness is, too," Dan Johnson, a music critic and blogger who is a friend of Muhly's, and who often writes his program notes, says. "Although, from my point of view, Nico seems to be right at the center of things, I think he still feels somehow isolated and out of place. His music can be terrifically glossy. But the gloss always has these tiny cracks in it, and sometimes the places where these cracks open up are the most important part of the piece." Neal Goren, the artistic director of Gotham Chamber Opera, which plans to commission a work from Muhly, says, "Nico is not one of those composers who writes music to hide who he is."

The shade of Britten also inhabits one of Muhly's more ambitious forthcoming projects: an opera to be co-commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera and Lincoln Center Theatre. (Negotiations are still under way, but Peter Gelb, the general manager of the Met, says, "He's the type of composer that we in the opera world, and in the classical world, are always looking for—someone who is both original and accessible, and who has the potential to be instantly appealing.") Muhly's proposed plot, which has the dark ambiguity of "Peter Grimes," is based on a lurid British true-crime story involving a fourteen-year-old boy who, through a complex series of Internet chat-room impersonations and ruses, fulfilled an erotic fantasy by luring another boy to meet him in an alleyway and stab him.

"To me, what he did was he composed something," Muhly says of his projected protagonist. "He wrote this thing, completely scripted, that happened to his own body. You see a dancer walking around and you are, like, *dancer*, because he is all turned out. And when you see a violist you are, like, *violist*, because he has this thing on his neck. And with composers, there is a secret, late-night knife to the chest."

The Aurora Orchestra gathered to rehearse Muhly's concerto at St. Mary's Church in Barnes, in southwest London, a few days before the performance, in early January. As the musicians warmed up, Muhly wandered around the church, admiring the change bells in the bell tower and peeking into the vestry, which had shelves stacked with candles and racks of clerical gowns. At one point, the orchestra ran through another piece on the program: two motets by William Byrd, arranged by Muhly. A puzzled clarinetist said that a note he had been assigned sounded wrong, and Muhly explained that the bum note was deliberate: his composition was not merely an arrangement of Byrd's score but, rather, an imitation of a live, imperfect performance of the music. When the orchestra turned to Muhly's own composition, the musicians—a trombonist in a stocking cap, a double-bass player in a Led Zeppelin T-shirt—cast serious glances in Muhly's direction as they set to work on the score. Muhly sat back in his seat with satisfaction. "This is just what I wanted," he said after a few minutes. "It's busy, but clear. Like bees. Organic."

At the Royal Academy of Music, a few nights later, Muhly, dressed in a dark jacket and pants and a black sweater over a white shirt and a sparkly silver tie, sat toward the rear of the concert hall. Looming portraits of academy alumni hung on the walls, and four enormous chandeliers were suspended above. The piece began with the melancholy song of the electric violin—looped, three-note phrases overlapping, but never precisely matching up, to create disordered sonic patterns, like uncharted stars. Gradually, other instruments joined in, strings and woodwinds picking up the violin's three-note signature to form clear constellations of sound. As the momentum built, the entire orchestra was shaped into harmony by the resonant, otherworldly violin. Toward the concerto's conclusion, the violin engaged in a duet with the celesta—an instrument named for its heavenly sound, and much favored by Muhly—while the other instruments faded out, as if vanishing into a lightening sky.

Muhly had entitled the piece "Seeing Is Believing," a punning reference to the problem of reconciling faith with science faced by the sixteenth-century astronomers whose studies had provided the score's original inspiration. However, the program notes, which Muhly had written, made no mention of the Renaissance. "At a certain point, all that falls away," he said, standing in the lobby of the academy after the performance. "What was I going to write: Tycho Brahe, blah, blah, blah? Can you imagine? It's too much information. In the end, it's just 'Look at the stars, here's some music.'"

By the time Muhly reached the reception that was being held in a basement concert room, he was already thinking about his next project: a collaboration with a singer from the Faroe Islands named Teitur Lassen, to be performed by the Holland Baroque Society in three Dutch cities in March. Lassen had come to London to hear the concerto, and he and Muhly huddled in a corner laying plans for their new piece, which was to consist of music composed to accompany a series of YouTube videos that had been chosen expressly for their mundanity.

"There's a way to search for interesting things on YouTube, and then there's a way to search for uninteresting things," Muhly said. "You put in search terms like 'My daughter's yard,' 'My friend's restaurant.'" The music was to be modelled on cantatas by Bach and anthems by Purcell, he explained. It was going to be great. ♦

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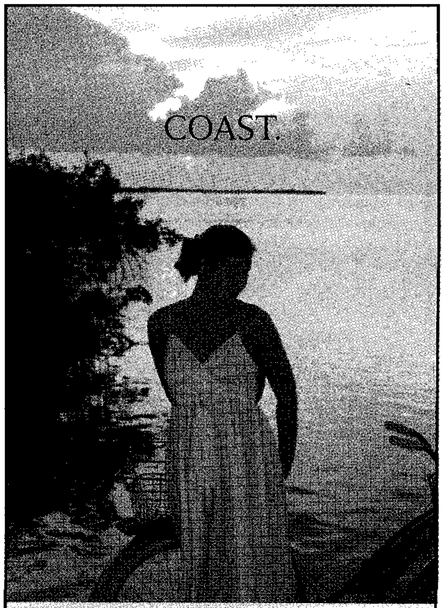

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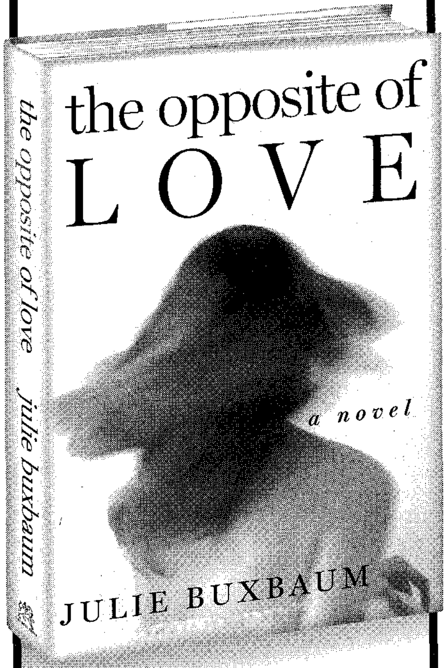

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PERSONAL HISTORY

CALL ME LOYD

The strange power of nicknames.

BY DAVID OWEN

My nickname when I was in junior high and high school, in Kansas City, was Loyd, my father's name. It was given to me inadvertently, in 1967, by my seventh-grade math teacher, who had taught my father thirty years earlier and sometimes forgot which of us he was calling on. In my father's day, the math teacher's nickname had been Tarz, short for Tarzan, because he was built like Johnny Weissmuller; by the time I had him, his nickname was Wheezer. He looked like Lyndon Johnson, with tremendous gravity-stretched jowls and earlobes. Age must have lengthened his scrotum, too, because he was always careful to lift his testicles out of the way before sitting in a chair or leaning back against the front of his desk. Sometimes, my friends and I, as we took our seats for math, would pretend to lift our testicles out of the way, too.

Wheezer supervised one of my study halls. One day, an eighth grader put a running tape recorder inside a locker in the back of the room, and every five or ten minutes the tape would scream, "WHEEEEEEE-ZER!" There would be pandemonium; then, gradually, everyone would settle down; then it would happen again. Wheezer never identified the responsible jerk—his term for any troublemaker. One day, before homeroom, he wrote the heading "First Class Jerk" on the blackboard behind his desk, along with a list of defining traits, and Ralph Lewis raised his hand and asked, "Sir, is a first-class jerk a jerk in the first-period class?" Wheezer glared at him for a long time, then said, "Guy, you're a jerk." He kept a jar of candy on his desk, and before math tests he would let each of us take a piece, calling it brain food.

My science teacher that year we called either Wayne (his real first name), Fleet (his real middle name), or Chutes (short for Parachute Pants). He wore baggy gray flannel trousers and pulled them up so high that they seemed to belong to a different clothing category: his bow tie and his belt buckle almost touched. He made us memorize the names of all the bones, muscles, and major nerves, assignments that infuriated me because they seemed lazy and pointless. One day when we were studying the muscles, Chutes held up one hand, raised his index finger and slowly moved it back and forth, like a low-speed metronome, and said, "Kinesiology: *kineese-*, movement; *-eeology*, the study of." We cracked each other up with that line for days, and, even now, almost forty years later, I sometimes repeat it to myself. When we were in high school, a few of us drove to a pharmacy we'd heard about, in a suburb where none of us lived, so that we could use someone's older brother's driver's license to try to buy a bottle in the liquor department at the back of the store, but we found Chutes working the cash register and had to pretend that we'd come for something else—maybe cigarettes, which, in those days, grownups didn't care about very much. Chutes had demonstrated the dangers of tobacco in science class by lighting one of his own cigarettes and blowing the smoke through a Kleenex, making the paper turn brownish, but his concern had to do mainly with the possible effect on our "wind," important to him because he coached track.

Chutes did most of his own smoking in his office in the gym, or in the faculty lounge, which was sometimes so clouded that you could barely see all the way from the door to the coffeemaker; teachers who smoked pipes smoked right in class. My seventh-grade English teacher, whose nickname was Ashcan, was famous for having once set his tweed jacket on fire by absent-mindedly stuffing a lit pipe on top of a book of matches in his pocket; he was also famous for having once become trapped, flat on his back, between his desk and the rear wall of the classroom, after tipping too far in his chair. My eighth-grade French teacher—who had the same first and last names as a celebrated poetess—would occasionally smoke a cigarette

NIXON
AIR FRANCE
REAL-KILL

Clockwise from left: Mrs. Lombus, Two-Beer, Lombus, Carol Barrel, Groans, Mrs. Groans, Mrs. Two-Beer, Loyd-o.

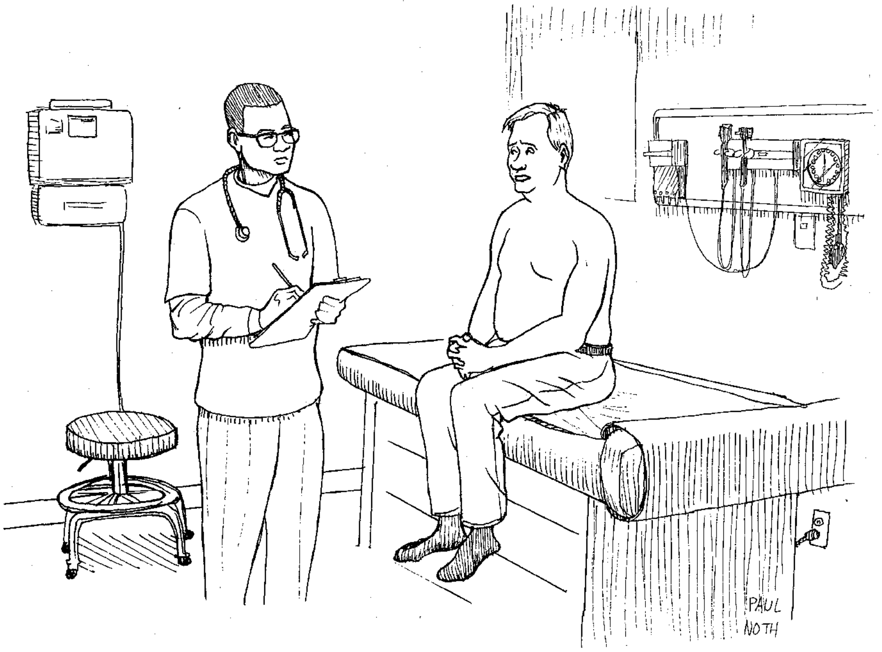
KEN TAYLOR

while standing in the doorway of her office, which adjoined her classroom. She would hold the cigarette behind the door, where we couldn't see it, and duck her head around to take puffs. She told us that the streets of Paris were superior to the streets of Kansas City because they had names instead of numbers, although, apparently, she had no quarrel with the numbering of arrondissements. One day, when she had stepped out of the classroom for a moment, several of us lifted her desk, intending to turn it a hundred and eighty degrees, and accidentally tipped it over—a stunt that made her cry and got us in trouble with the principal, whose nickname was J.J. and whom we imitated, constantly, by grabbing one another on the shoulder with a Vulcan nerve pinch and barking "Wanna borrow two-fifty?" (the price of a haircut).

Giving teachers nicknames is a way of weakening their terrible authority, probably. Assigning a nickname is usually flattering to the recipient, however, even if the nickname itself isn't, and if I were a teacher I'd rather be a Wheezer or a Chutes than one of the faceless, unremembered ones known only by their real names. My friends and I had teachers and coaches we called Flipper (real last name, Flappan), Stublet (not very tall), Stank (hygiene problems), Bat (short for Wombat; real name, Wambold), Dawg (short for Schoondog; real name, Schoonover), Papa Joe (longtime gym teacher), Easy Ed (beloved basketball coach), Myhoo (real last name, Mayhew), Woodchuck (real first name, Charles). There was a Latin teacher whose real last name was Wucker, an unfairly easy target; we called him Ed (his first name), Tony (what his wife called him), or Wuck. My American-history teacher we called Gil, his real first name, but I knew from reading old yearbooks that he had once been called the Fox. (A student of his in the mid-sixties, who had been famous for his Fox impressions, and whose high-school nickname had been Josh, later returned as a teacher in the same department and was known to his own students as Squirmer.) Gil, by the time he taught me, had poor eyesight and almost no peripheral vision and was therefore easy to play tricks on. There were students in the class named Yeckel and Eager, and Gil, who couldn't see very far beyond the front of his desk, often amalgamated them into a single student, whom he called Yeager, leaving the two of them to decide which should answer any question directed to the merged entity. My chemistry teacher we called Fred, his real first name. I once met him unexpectedly coming around a corner and, without thinking, said, "Hi, Fred," surprising both of us. He used colored chalk in class, and, in the course of a typical day, would gradually become coated with pastel dust: hands, pants, jacket, nose, forehead, hair. There was a math teacher named Mr. Meyers, whom we called Mr. Mars after the way he drawled his own last name. Mr. Mars once gave me a detention for smoking a cigarette in the bathroom while I was serving a detention for a different offense. On another occasion, he suggested that it would be funny if the student newspaper referred to Neil Newhouse, an upperclassman, as Nail Oldbarn.

The person with perhaps the best nickname of anybody I've ever known was an early childhood friend of mine, Bumpy Macomber. The Macombers lived diagonally across the street from us, in a house that supposedly appeared briefly in a movie concerning juvenile delinquents. (A teen-ager comes running out of the Macombers' front door and jumps into a car belonging to another teen-ager, and they drive away.) Bumpy's real name was William. His father, also William, had been called Bumpy, too, during some earlier part of his life, perhaps when he was in the Artillery, but had handed the nickname down to his son, like a treasured pocket watch, and was now just Bill. Bumpy's parents were generally known to be the best-looking grownups in the neighborhood, and probably for several miles. They, unlike my parents, slept in a double bed, which I often saw unmade, and their house was the only one I knew where you could find a copy of *Playboy* just lying on a coffee table. I was aware, because Bumpy had told me, that his father considered my father to be somewhat boring, and there was evidence to support his opinion: my parents never did a thing that the Macombers did pretty often, which was to dress their kids in pajamas, load them into the back of their station wagon, and take them to a drive-in movie. I spent the night at the Macombers' house once, the summer after first grade, and Bumpy's parents asked me if I was sure it would be all right with my parents if I stayed up with everyone else to watch "The Tonight Show." I was with Bumpy the afternoon he determined, by repeatedly banging it against his family's white upright piano, that the black plastic shell of a Magic 8-Ball concealed a breakable jarlike glass vessel filled with a dark fluid closely resembling ink. Bumpy had two younger sisters, the younger of whom, Lizzie, called my mother Mizzenowen.

Until my family moved a half mile away, in the fall of second grade, Bumpy was usually either my best or my second-best friend. We started a boys' club whose only rule was that you had to swear you would never get married, and we had a fight with a neighborhood girl, who had claimed that, because she was one year younger than I was and two years younger than Bumpy, we would die before she did.



"*Will I still be able to not exercise?*"

Recently, I saw an old black-and-white photograph of Bumpy, his sisters, me, my sister, and Freddy Wells—my next-door neighbor and backup best friend, whose father was a pilot for T.W.A.—and suddenly realized that we grew up not just a certain number of years ago but in the lost, archeological past, when people didn't look or dress anything like the way they do now. In the photograph, Bumpy, Freddy, and I are wearing improvised cowboy outfits that no modern boy would be seen in, and all six of us look like children from history, from a time when brand consciousness was limited to a preference for either Keds or PF Flyers.

At some point, Bumpy began calling me Dodo, like the extinct bird, because of my initials, and I found that I liked being known by something other than my name. When I went to sleepaway camp for the first time, the summer after fourth grade, one of my counsellors, whose name was Michael but who was called Boogie, asked me if I had a nickname, and I, remembering Dodo, said I did and that it was Dumdum. I don't think I had planned that in advance—unlike my mother, who told her fellow-campers to call her Matzy (a nickname she had devised for herself on the train to Michigan, based on her real last name, Matz), or my wife, who tried, unsuccessfully, to use summer camp as a transition from Ann to Twink. A nickname, because it's custom-made rather than installed at the factory, can seem like a better reflection of one's true self, so often invisible to others. Summer camp, potentially, provides an opportunity to begin life anew, with a fresh identity and erased personal history, like a participant in the witness-protection program.

Calling myself Dumdum for a couple of weeks turned out to be a good move and a valuable lesson in human nature: people are predisposed to like people with disarming nicknames. At camp that summer, three or four older girls, who were probably going into sixth or seventh grade, enlisted me and a couple of other younger boys to play post office with them; a pretty twelve-year-old girl borrowed a sweater of mine, wore it for two or three days, and gave it back, having changed its smell and slightly changed its shape; and another girl, on the last night of camp, took me for a long walk through the woods, sat next to me under a tree, and told me it was too bad that things could never work out between us, on account of her being thirteen and my being ten. I realized (many years later) that all these girls must have begun to be interested in boys in general, rather than in me in particular, and wanted to work out a few kinks on a harmless version, a Dum-dum, before tackling the real thing. I don't remember any of their names.

When I began junior high school, I associated with the kind of students who had good grades and served on the student council, but I yearned to associate with the kind who got detentions for smoking during their detentions. Having a Wheezer-bestowed nickname helped to make that change possible, somehow; so did playing football and being a class clown. By the middle of eighth grade, I had partially repositioned myself as a troublemaker and, in doing so, had acquired friends with troublemaker nicknames: Hinkley (real name, Howard; known to teachers and parents as Howdie); Dick (real name, Richard; known to teachers and parents as Ricky); Pajamas (real name, Perry; known to teachers and parents as P.J.); Bayshup ("Bishop" as pronounced by both Wheezer and Mr. Mars); and Henry (real name, Greg). I also had friends called Boym, Soz, Gordo, Dunc, Twig, Dab, and Piller.

Hinkley and Henry had both been given their nicknames by friends of Hinkley's older brother, whose real name was Alexander but who had been known since birth as Ack, the nickname that his father, also Alexander, had wanted for himself but had never been given. ("Hinkley" was inspired by the name of the dim-witted felon played by Donald Sutherland in "The Dirty Dozen," Vernon L. Pinkley. We also often addressed Hinkley by the name his mother used for him when she was angry: "Howard" compressed to an explosive monosyllable.) Ack's best friend, whose real first name was George, was called Cookie. In high school, Ack and Cookie survived a car accident in which much of the engine of Ack's muscle car ended up in the front seat between them. They had been drinking and were not wearing seat belts, which, in those days, were still treated mainly as nuisances or curiosities. Ack and Cookie and their friends held wild parties. They served a beverage they called Mother Hunch Punch, which consisted of equal parts fruit juice and clear liquor, and was mixed in a large barrel in the back yard. My friends and I lurked around the edges of those parties, smoking Swisher Sweets or Mississippi Crooks or some other easily pilfered brand of cigars and making off with the occasional bottle of gin. The house in which I threw up more often than I did anywhere else, in those years, was Hinkley's.

One of Hinkley's best friends was Richie, whose brother—two years older, a star athlete in three sports—was called Stump because he was so short. In high school, Stump suffered what at first seemed to be a football injury but turned out to be cancer, and one of his legs had to be amputated, making his nickname seem like an eerie foreshadowing. He died before graduation. Because of Richie, my preferred cigarette brand for a while was Old Gold. Richie had offered me one and said, "I bet you a dollar you can't smoke it down to where it says 'O.G.'" I took deep drags until I had obliterated the initials printed near the filter tip, and he shrugged and said, "I didn't hear anything." Richie, who was married for a while to one of my sister's best friends, died before he was forty. He was playing golf, and suddenly gripped the back of his head and said, "Something is really wrong," and fell to the ground. A day later, he was dead, of a brain hemorrhage.

When I was a teen-ager, I knew girls called Brownie, Gonger, Book, Icebox, Momo, Jaybird, Cuppy, Haz, and Hat, among others. Gonger went on to marry someone who isn't related to me but is also an Owen; I would have been concerned, in high school, if her future married name had been revealed to me. Haz died. Hat was my girlfriend for the second half of high school and for a little while afterward, and we shared a single private nickname, never used in front of others. She and Gonger had a classmate named Martha who was almost as skinny as I was; Martha and I called each other Pencil Legs. My sternum projected beyond my ribs when I was young, a malformation called a pigeon breast. In the locker room one day, I noticed that my toughest ninth-grade football teammate, who played fullback and middle linebacker and was called Mad Dog by our coaches, had a pigeon breast, too. I told him what it was, and, on and off through high school, we called each other

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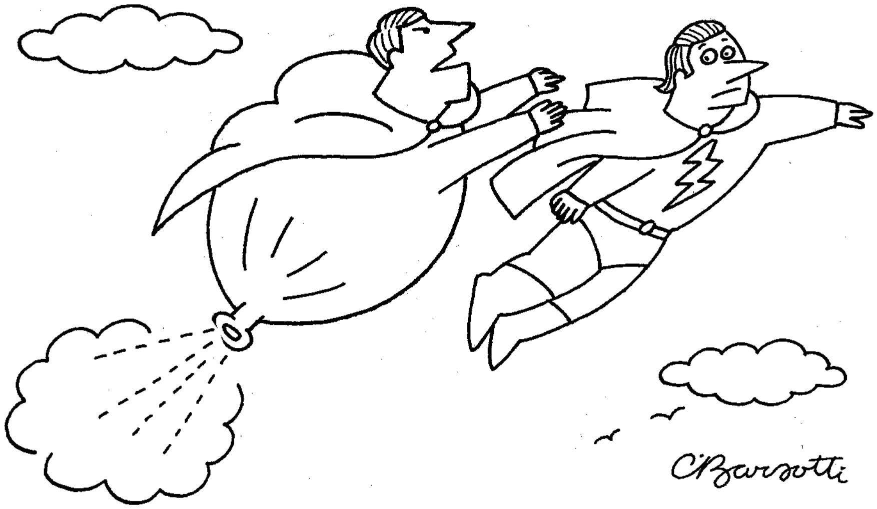


"No, it won't last long, but while it does I aim to fight as much evil as possible."

• •

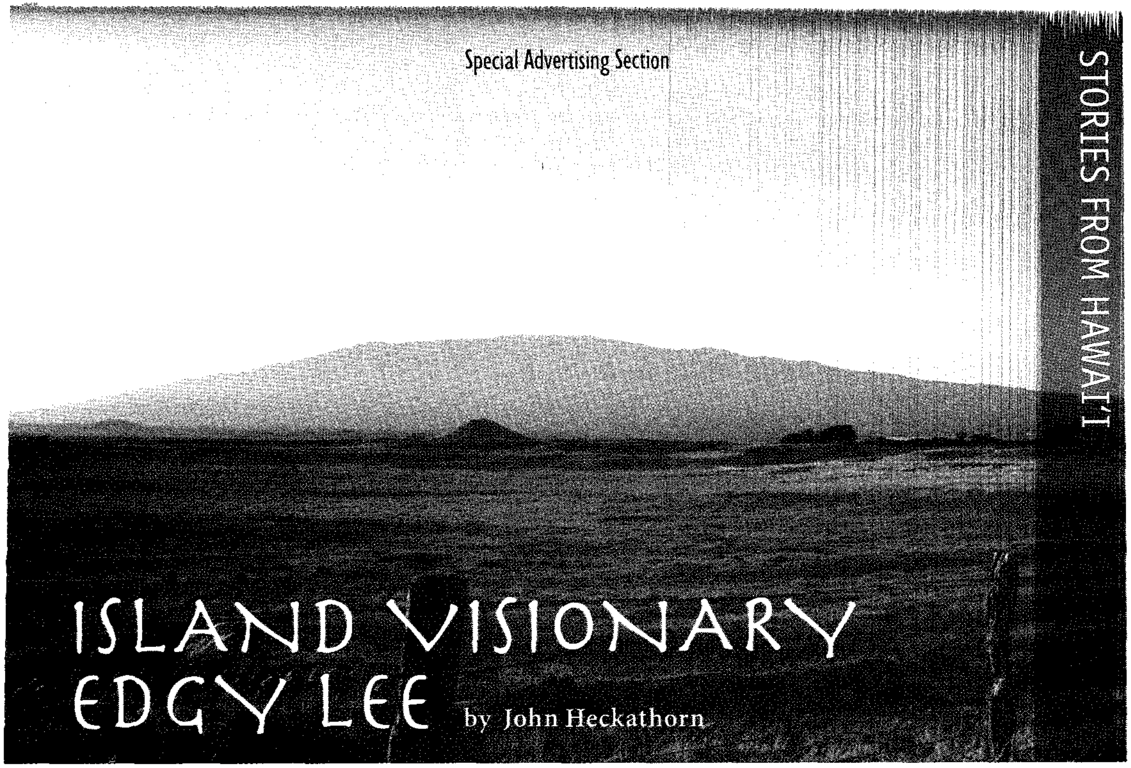
Chicken Tit, making me mind mine less.

Being known to my friends by my father's name created occasional opportunities for comical confusion, as when one of them would telephone our house, ask for Loyd, and get him instead of me. Hearing my friends call me Loyd must have made my father wonder whether he and my mother had been wrong not to give me that name officially, making me Loyd Cylven Owen III. But his own name was sometimes troublesome to him: people were always restoring the missing L and garbling his middle name, which looks vaguely Welsh to a non-Welshman but must have been made up by one of our semi-literate northern-Missouri ancestors, plenty of whom had had peculiar names of their own: Risdon, Fleeta, Orvall, Olin, Melton. For me, being called Loyd became a mild problem only later, when, for a couple of years, I had to keep track of which friends knew me as what. In college once, I telephoned a girl I had known slightly in high school, in order to ask her out, and was pretty far into an already awkward conversation before realizing that, because I had identified myself as David, she had no idea who I was.

When my father was in high school, he and his best friends called each other Lombus (real last name, Lombardi), Groans (real last name, Groner), Tube-Ear (a parent-and-teacher-resistant spelling of Two-Beer), and Loyd-o. I know from old letters that they also occasionally addressed each other as Turd Bird, Crummy Chummy, Trash, and Cesspool, among other things—not so much nicknames as epistolary flourishes. They had been best friends and neighbors since childhood and remained best friends and neighbors throughout their lives. For many years, they and their wives regularly played poker together—on a long table covered with an old Army blanket when the game was at our house. Every five years, the poker group hired a photographer to take a picture of them dressed in humorous costumes. In the picture from 1962, my father is wearing tails and riding a tricycle, and my mother is wearing a full-length raccoon coat to conceal the fact that she is pregnant with my brother. In the picture from 1967, my mother is wearing a wooden barrel and, seemingly, nothing else—a visual play on one of their nicknames for her, Carol Barrel.

My father's mother was called Nellie when she was born. At some point during her childhood, she crossed out that line on her birth certificate and wrote in "Mary Helen," the name she used from then on. She was a Christian Scientist, although she allowed my father, when he was growing up, to be treated by doctors and given vaccinations. When I was in college, I broke my arm after being pushed from a high mantelpiece, on which I had been dancing in a tuxedo, and she paid her Christian Science practitioner five dollars to join her in praying for my recovery. My siblings and I called her Gaga, and we called our grandfather, who had worked for an insurance company and always wore a necktie, Dada. My other grandmother, a forbidding widow who had grown up in a fancy family in Austin, Texas, wasn't the kind of person to whom children easily give a cozy nickname—although she and I got along well and, when she was in her eighties and I was in college, we sometimes had cocktails in her living room at nine or ten in the morning, Scotch for her and bourbon for me. She often drove back to Texas from Kansas City, where she had moved in 1921, when she was twenty-six, and during those trips she stopped near the border between Kansas and Oklahoma to use the rest room at a particular Texaco station, whose owner saw her so often that he assumed she lived nearby. She told him that he had the nicest ladies' room she had ever seen on a highway, and on the basis of that they exchanged Christmas cards for many years. When I was two, I addressed her once as "Mrs. Matz," the only thing I'd ever heard anyone call her, and it was hastily decided that from then on she should be known to her grandchildren as Grandmother. My father never called her Anne, her first name, until she was in her late eighties or early nineties and had forgotten that she didn't approve of familiarity. "I like you better than Carol's first husband," she told him at one point, referring to him.

When Ann and I were first married and living in New York City, we had a neighbor, a little older than we were, who, for some reason, began calling me Steve, and then, equally mysteriously, switched to Scott. I have never liked being addressed as Mr. Owen. The Colombian woman who cleaned our apartment every other week insisted on calling me that, and ignored my many requests to use my first name instead—until, finally, she gave in, to some extent, by calling me Mr. Davis; because of her, Ann and I sometimes call each other Davis and Avis. Before we became parents, we discussed what we wanted to be called by our children. Ann said, at first, that she wanted to be Mum, which is what she had called her own mother; I objected that "Mum" sounded British and, besides, was already taken. We ended up being, initially, just Mommy and Daddy, but when our daughter—whom we had named Laura, after the author and main character of Ann's favorite books when she was growing up—was



ISLAND VISIONARY EDGY LEE

by John Heckathorn

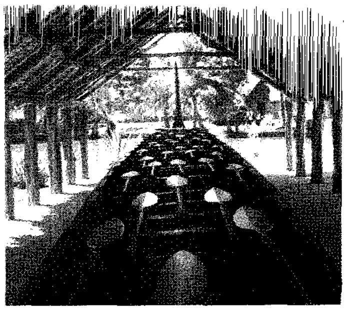
The filmmaker and artist Edgy Lee has roots in Hawaiʻi dating back five generations: her great-great-grandfather was a citizen of the Hawaiian kingdom in the eighteen-sixties. Still, she left the Islands after graduating from high school. "I missed Hawaiʻi, but I assumed I could not have a film career there," she says.

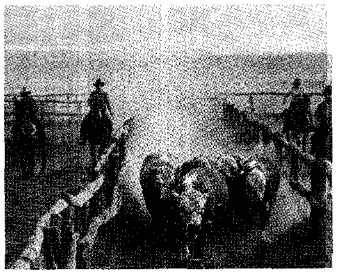
Lee began work as a model, and then successfully made the transition to a career behind the camera, garnering for herself numerous awards from festivals around the world. When she went back to Hawaiʻi in the early nineteen-nineties to shoot *Papakolea*, a documentary about Hawaiian land issues, her return evoked a flood of memories. She recalled growing up near Waikīkī: "We hung out on the beach as teenagers. It was like living in a candy store, such a treat, every day. People traveled from all over the world to experience its pleasures—and we lived there." She also had memories of her uncle's ranch on Oʻahu's North Shore. "I thought there was a real danger it could all disappear," she says. It suddenly occurred to her: "Somebody should make it a mission to preserve and chronicle this."

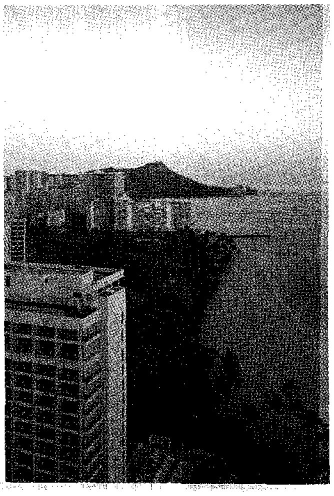
Returning full time to the Islands, Lee put together a string of feature-length documentaries. Her memories of her uncle's ranch turned into *Paniolo O Hawaiʻi*, a film that told the stories of cowboys in Hawaiʻi. These *paniolo* predated the cowboys of the American West. Their ranching culture was unlike any other, with leather hats, feather lei, and the strains of the slack-key guitar. "I wanted people to realize just how precious this history was, how close we were to losing it."

Lee's love of Waikīkī resulted in the film *Waikīkī: In the Wake of Dreams.* "Doing the documentary allowed me to dig beneath the surface," she says. She points out that while many people know of the area's unique combination of beaches, tropical parks, and hotels, Waikīkī's story goes deeper. "Waikīkī had a special place in native Hawaiian culture," she says. "Hawaiʻi is not just a place of scenery. Everyone who comes here reaps the benefit of the native Hawaiian culture and traditions. They are as important as the physical beauty of the landscape. And just as beautiful."

Edgy Lee is glad she went away, "because when I came back, I appreciated how rich with history the Islands were, how open the people were. And how lucky I was to be here."







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about two, she experimented with calling us by our first names, as children often do. Ann didn't like that and, when Laura persisted in calling her Ann, said, "I think people ought to be called what they want to be called"; Laura said that, in that case, she would like to be called Megan. I, by contrast, enjoyed hearing a toddler use my first name and never discouraged her, and ever since then, to both our children, Ann and I have usually been Mom and Dave. When our son, John, was in high school, he had a classmate who thought that calling me Dave was dangerously strange; he always paused before saying it, and then pronounced it as though he were reading it from a page on which it had been printed in italics and enclosed in quotation marks.

Nobody calls me Loyd anymore, except for Hinkley, Dick, Pajamas, and a few other high-school classmates I seldom see. My mother usually calls me Dave. My sister, Anne, sometimes calls me Pr-r-r-e-e-e-ciou-u-u-s, drawing the word out and sort of half-bleating it, as though she were a cartoon sheep. When we were in college, she made me laugh the hardest I've ever laughed, late one night when were watching a Perry Mason rerun on the tiny black-and-white TV in our parents' kitchen, by suggesting that we pretend that a man Perry was cross-examining, a Mr. Rawson, was actually named Mr. Lawson. Surprisingly many of my golf buddies, but none of my other friends, call me Davy; two or three call me Dave-o; one calls me D.O. I have no particular preference, although, out of habit, I almost always introduce myself as David. Recently, I had to leave a telephone message for a man who goes by Dave, and, without thinking about it, I said, "Hi, Dave, this is David"—then worried that he would think I had made what I felt to be a significant distinction. Yet if I had called myself Dave, too—"Hi, Dave, this is Dave"—might I not have seemed condescending, given that in our first conversation I had introduced myself as David? Or, conversely, if I had called both of us David mightn't I have come off as insensitive, or disapproving?

Ann and I don't have grandchildren yet, but we've talked a little about what we hope they will call us. One seldom discussed fact of life is that, if you live long enough, the name your grandchildren use for you will probably be the name you die with. During the last years of my father's life, he was no longer really Loyd or Loyd-o or Dad but mainly Pa—and not just to my children and their cousins but also to me and Ann, to my siblings and their spouses, and even, often, to my mother. The nickname that your grandchildren use for you, therefore, had better be something you don't mind hearing. For a brief time, my eldest nephew called my mother Ninnie, a name she didn't care for (although we all liked and adopted Great Ninnie, the name he devised for my grandmother), but my mother, with some effort, was able to regain control of her identity and to establish herself as Grammie, which is what even I now call her much of the time. When Laura was learning to talk, she first addressed Ann's parents as Man and That, but later adopted Grandpa and Grandma, and that's now what I usually call them, too. Ann is leaning, for herself, toward Nannie, Nonnie, or, perhaps, Nonie. I hope to continue all the way to the grave as Dave. "For Christmas, we're going to see Nannie and Dave" is what I imagine our grandchildren saying, as though they were speaking of an elderly woman and her gigolo.

Not long before my father died, I had a dream in which he asked me, somewhat plaintively, "Why does everybody call me Loyd-o?" I don't know what that dream could have signified, since he liked being called Loyd-o, and since the name Loyd was something interesting and unusual that the two of us had got a kick out of sharing for a little while. Maybe my subconscious was trying to come to terms with the fact that he wasn't going to be around much longer, or maybe my dream's true subject was actually myself—usually a fair bet. Recently, Ann e-mailed my siblings a photograph of me intently using a lobster pick to extract bits of meat from some hickory nuts, which I had gathered on a walk and then laboriously cracked open, and my brother, John, responded that it was "always interesting to see the unexpected ways in which our inner Loyd-o expresses itself." He and I increasingly notice and discuss such signs in ourselves: a sudden interest in recreational vehicles, a desire to own a more expensive charcoal grill, the purchase of a complicated gadget to perform a task we will never get to, a thickening around the middle. But there's nothing he or I or anyone else can do about any of that. We all come to an end, and our names, sooner or later, end, too. ♦

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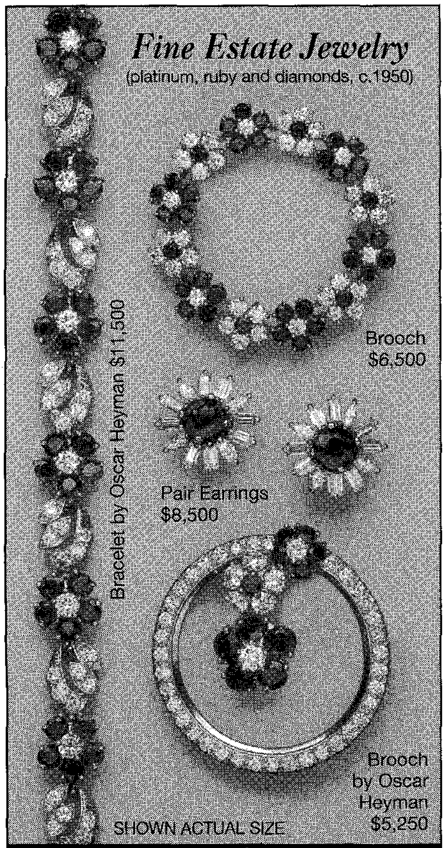
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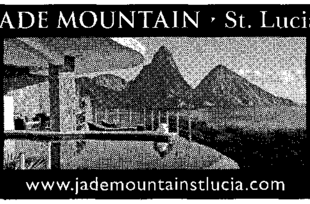
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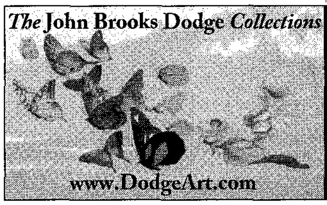
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SHOUTS & MURMURS

CHANGES: A 2008 CAMPAIGN QUIZ

BY PAUL SLANSKY

1. Who is Michael Palladino?

(a) One of two young men who interrupted a speech by Hillary Clinton by yelling, "Iron my shirt! Iron my shirt!"

(b) The aide to Barack Obama who was shoved by Bill O'Reilly at a rally.

(c) The adviser to Fred Thompson's campaign who turned out to have been convicted of cocaine trafficking.

(d) The boxer who hosted a Nevada Obama event and who had been convicted of battery.

(e) The New York City police detective who scoffed at Rudolph Giuliani's claim to have been "at Ground Zero as often as, if not more than, most of the workers."

(f) The formerly gay gospel singer who advocates "curing" homosexuality with prayer, and whose performance at Obama-sponsored concerts upset gays and liberals.

2. What did Bill Clinton call a "fairy tale"?

(a) Mike Huckabee's contention that gay marriage would lead to increased bestiality.

(b) Obama's claim that he has consistently opposed the Iraq war from the beginning.

(c) Mitt Romney's positive remarks about Hitler's scientific achievement in creating "liquefied coal."

(d) Chuck Norris's endorsement of Huckabee on the ground that he is "not afraid to stand up for a Creator."

(e) The report that Obama and Dick Cheney might be distant cousins, which prompted Obama to remark, "He's the black sheep of the family."

(f) The suggestion by David Axelrod, Obama's chief strategist, that Hillary Clinton bore some responsibility for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto.

3. True or false: When the Clinton camp was mocked for its efforts to turn a kindergarten essay written by Obama into a reason not to vote for him, campaign officials claimed that the press release had been intended as "a joke."

4. Three of these statements refer to Fred Thompson. Which two refer to Mitt Romney?

(a) He asked an unresponsive audience, "Can I have some applause?"

(b) He referred to Russia as the "Soviet Union," which it stopped being seventeen years ago.

(c) He said, "Some people have said we ought to close Guantánamo. My view is we ought to double Guantánamo."

(d) He avoided a question about the Terri Schiavo controversy by saying, "That's going back in history. I don't remember the details of it."

(e) He declared, "Americans do not respect believers of convenience. Americans tire of those who would jettison their beliefs, even to gain the world."

5. Wayne Dumond is to Mike Huckabee as ________ is to Mike Dukakis.

(a) Willie Horton
(b) John Kerry
(c) John Sasso

6. Who is Marianne Pernold Young?

(a) The Iowa college student planted in the audience by the Clinton campaign to ask the candidate a question that she was eager to answer.

(b) The CNN reporter whom Bill Clinton scolded by saying, "This is what you live for," after she asked him to comment on a former supporter's observation that the Clintons' distortion of Obama's record is "reprehensible."

(c) The New Hampshire photographer who asked Hillary Clinton the question that made her choke up.

(d) The CBS newswoman who asked Elizabeth Kucinich, "Would you remove [your tongue stud] if you became First Lady, or leave it in?"

(e) The owner of the landscaping

company that employed illegal immigrants to mow Romney's lawn, prompting accusations that he lives in a "sanctuary mansion."

7. Two of these statements refer to John McCain. Which two refer to Ron Paul?

(a) When a supporter, referring to Hillary Clinton, asked, "How do we beat the bitch?" he replied, "That's an excellent question."

(b) He said that he would "prefer" a Christian president to a Muslim one.

(c) He warned CNN/YouTube debate viewers about a "NAFTA highway" on the drawing board that would link the U.S. with Canada and Mexico and could lead to the three countries merging.

(d) He voted against giving the Congressional Medal of Honor to Rosa Parks.

8. True or false: An hour after attacking Barack Obama's voting record on "Meet the Press," Hillary Clinton appeared at a black church and declared herself to be "so proud" of him.

9. Five of these statements refer to Mike Huckabee. Which five refer to Rudy Giuliani?

(a) He said of MoveOn.org's "General Betray Us" ad, "It passed a line that we should not allow American political organizations to pass."

(b) Asked about financial disclosures, he said, "I'm not doing more than what is absolutely required."

(c) He asked, "Don't Mormons believe that Jesus and the Devil are brothers?"

(d) He said, "Most of our prisoners would love to be in a facility more like Guantánamo."

(e) He scoffed at the notion that sleep deprivation is torture, saying, "On that theory, I'm getting tortured running for President of the United States. That's plain silly."

(f) He turned up on *Outdoor Life's* list of the twenty-five most influential people in hunting and fishing.

(g) He assured a New Hampshire child who asked about the possibility of intergalactic attack that "we'll be prepared for that."

(h) Ten years ago, his son was allegedly involved in the hanging of a dog while at Boy Scout camp.

(i) A conservative group ran an ad saying that he understands that "all the average guy with a Confederate flag on his pickup truck is saying is he's proud to be a Southerner."

(j) It was written of him, "[His] Nixonian soul comes bearing the face of a particularly cruel Renaissance cardinal."

10. Who is James Clyburn?

(a) The Clinton campaign official who resigned after raising the issue of Obama's youthful drug use.

(b) The Georgia congressman who said that Obama is "no Martin Luther King."

(c) The Clinton adviser who said that Obama appeals to voters who want an "imaginary hip black friend."

(d) The South Carolina congressman who told Bill Clinton to "chill a little bit" with the race-baiting.

(e) The Obama press secretary who took the blame for a memo cataloguing race-related verbal gaffes by the Clintons and their supporters.

(f) The indicted Chicago slumlord to whom Obama returned more than forty thousand dollars in contributions.

Who said what?

11. John Edwards.

12. Hillary Clinton.

13. Barack Obama.

14. John McCain.

15. Mike Huckabee.

16. Bill Richardson.

17. Mitt Romney.

18. Rudy Giuliani.

(a) "Americans are looking for a change."

(b) "Our time for change has come."

(c) "I believe deeply in change."

(d) "Look, what we need is change, there's no question."

(e) "I know that I have been an agent of change."

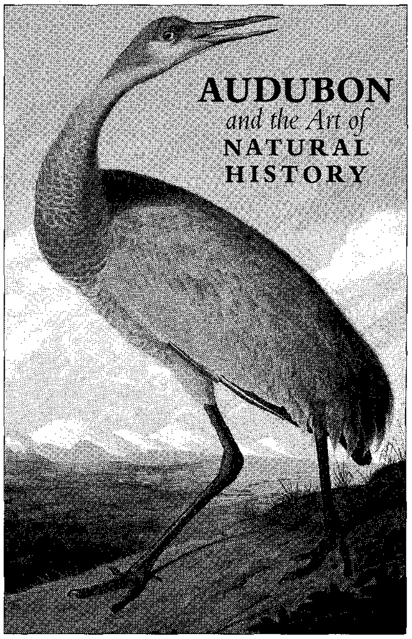
(f) "I want to make change but I've already made change. I will continue to make change. . . . I embody change."

(g) "Not only can I talk change with you, I've lived it."

(h) "We don't mention September 11th nearly as much as people think."

Answers:

(1) e, (2) b, (3) True, (4) c, e, (5) a, (6) c, (7) c, d, (8) True, (9) a, b, e, g, j, (10) d, (11) c, (12) f, (13) b, (14) e, (15) a, (16) d, (17) g, (18) h.



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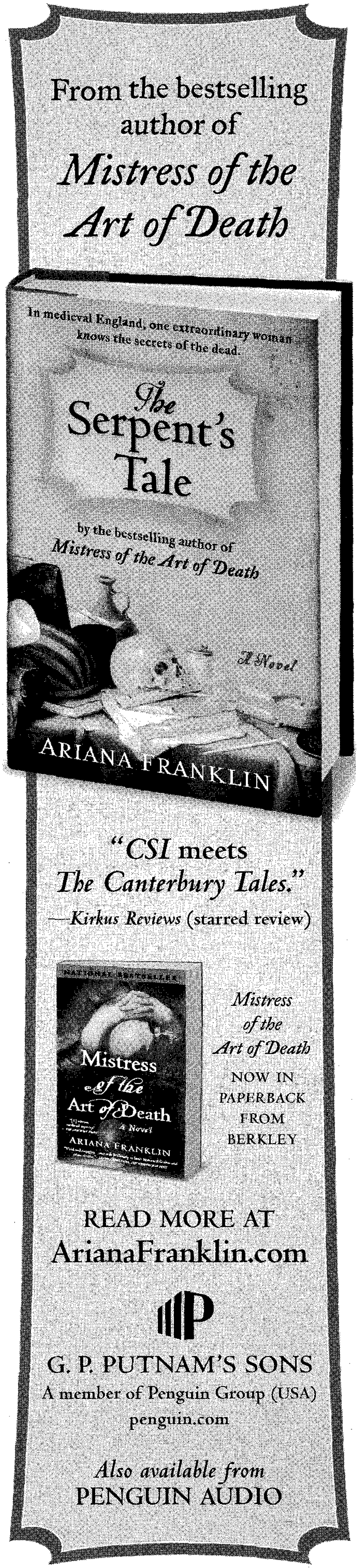
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ANNALS OF INVENTION

THINKING IN THE RAIN

An artist takes on the umbrella.

BY SUSAN ORLEAN

The Steve Hollinger experience can be described most simply as multimedia. For one thing, it includes olfactory surprises. My apartment was right above Steve's for several years, and on a regular basis he would call to warn me about odors that might waft their way from the second floor, where he lived, to my apartment on the third. Once in a while, the warning was about something he'd be cooking, but often it was more unexpected; he would call to say that he was going to be using turpentine, or linseed oil, or exotic solvents, or some kind of stinky paint, and wanted to make sure that the smell wouldn't drive me crazy. Other calls were about surprising noises: "I'm going to be using a table saw to cut up some ammunition boxes, so I hope it's not too loud," or "I'm drilling through some chunks of cement, so let me know if it bothers you."

One day last year, Hollinger walked around his neighborhood carrying another one of his surprises. The neighborhood is Fort Point Channel, a cluster of decommissioned factory buildings in downtown Boston which now house hundreds of artists, so it is commonplace to see residents kitted out in attire not sold at Talbots, carrying objects that appear extraterrestrial. Even so, Hollinger attracted attention. He had spent the previous month mostly locked in his apartment, furiously teaching himself the principles of aerodynamics, the physics of hydrology, and the basics of how to operate a Singer sewing machine, and he was at last testing what he had been working on—a reimagined, reinvented umbrella, with gutters and airfoils and the elegant drift of a bird's wing. "I knew I was on to something," he says now. "I was hardly outside for five minutes before someone stopped me and said, 'Where can I get one of those?'"

Hollinger is not, per se, an umbrella man; he is a sculptor who makes assemblages out of found materials. They are often kinetic and frequently reference other media: a solar-powered flip-book movie of Hollinger doing a war dance, which you view through a prism in a large cement block, or perhaps a series of photo emulsions peeled off Polaroids showing trees being immolated in a nuclear test in the nineteen-sixties, or twenty-five atom-shaped spheres made of photo-sensitive tape, suspended between sheets of plate glass and a frame of barn wood. His sculpture has been displayed widely and is well respected, but it is his work as an inventor that pays most of his bills. He grew up in suburban Connecticut, but both his parents are artists, and bohemian enough to have found his unusual interests—breaking thermometers in order to add to his collection of mercury, for instance—the sign of a lively mind. He went on to study computer programming at SUNY Albany. When he graduated, in 1984, he worked first at Telex, a computer company in North Carolina, and then at Wang Laboratories, in Massachusetts, developing imaging-technology software. In 1989, he decided to become an inventor.

His first product was a program called PosterWorks, which allows images as large as five hundred feet by five hundred feet to be produced, in sections, on an ordinary printer. In other words, if you had PosterWorks and enough paper and tape, you could enlarge a snapshot to about the size of a cruise ship. Hollinger's invention was released at a time when most billboards were still painted by hand, so it was genuinely revolutionary and wildly successful, especially among commercial users: many movie posters, including the original "Terminator" poster, on Hollywood Boulevard, were printed using PosterWorks. In short order, Hollinger invented a light pen for drawing on computer screens; software for turning videos into thumb-operated flip books; perforated paper to print flip books; and programs that could turn any

Imperfect though umbrellas may be, they do have staying power: they have existed in nearly the same form since 1000 B.C.

ISTVAN BANYAI

photograph into either a paint-by-number or a connect-the-dots image. The inventions—and, in particular, PosterWorks—covered the down payment on his Boston loft, helped him publish a book about his father, the painter Morton Hollinger, and gave him fifteen years of steady income that he lived on while working on art, writing, community projects, and more inventions, including the umbrella.

He loved all his inventions equally, although some were more practical than others. A few years after PosterWorks, Hollinger invented a system for animating three-dimensional objects using nothing but mirrors and lights. The prototype animated a human head, making it appear to talk and roll its eyes by using a spotlight to illuminate, in succession, one of ten little clay heads mounted in a box and having each image bounce off mirrors set at precise distances. He got it to work, as he says, "like a charm," and was so excited about it that when he finished the prototype he invited his friends over to celebrate. At the party, someone pointed out that there was no actual use for the invention, a consideration that had flitted through Hollinger's mind while he was working on the device but hadn't hovered long enough to discourage him. Around the same time, he developed a program for micro-printing—that is, shrinking text and images to a nearly atomic level, so that you could have, say, a business card with all your information printed so small that the card would appear to be blank except for a little black dot. Hollinger micro-printed some business cards for himself, and when I visited him recently he fished one out of his wallet for me. Since it looked like a plain card with an almost indiscernible freckle in one corner, I asked him to explain what the value of such a card would be. He studied it for a moment and said, "The only people who would be able to read your card would be people who owned microscopes." Then he grinned and added, "I guess it would be a very selective thing."

Hollinger's umbrella project, which is at the other end of the usefulness spectrum from micro-printing, was set in motion in November of 2004, on a particularly lousy, wet day in Boston. Hollinger was walking through downtown on his way to the Chase Gallery to install his sculptures for a solo show. Ahead of him on the sidewalk was a man fighting with a tattered umbrella, which was funnelling rain onto the man's back rather than shearing it away from him. The futility and anguish of humankind's relationship with the umbrella stuck in Hollinger's mind. Later that afternoon, at the gallery, he watched as the wind punched umbrellas sideways and then bounced them off cars parked along Newbury Street. He had always liked umbrellas, and often sketched them, because he found them aesthetically interesting, but this was the first time that he considered them as dysfunctional objects that might benefit from being reinvented. Stephanie Walker, who was then the director of the gallery, was watching the umbrella massacre with him. Knowing the way Hollinger's mind works, she wasn't surprised when he emerged a month later with a new vision for an umbrella and a patent application covering dozens of mechanical improvements. "I know how much he hates inefficient, bad design," Walker said recently. "And during that storm we were talking about how crazy and wasteful it was that umbrellas don't work well. So for him to invent a new umbrella made sense. I could really see him doing something like that." Walker is passionate about Hollinger's sculpture. "The first time I saw Steve's art work was the week I was getting married," she said. "I thought it was so amazing—so complex and sensitive and deep that I said to myself, If I meet this guy, I'm not going to get married!"

This was not the first time a Hollinger had responded to great need. In the late nineteen-sixties, the Catholic Archbishop of England dropped by to see Hollinger's father in his office in Portchester, New York. Morton Hollinger is an accomplished artist—he studied with the Italian artist Louis Di Valentin—with a long record of shows and awards. He also has a day job as the owner of a mail-order clerical-attire company. The Archbishop had come by to discuss bishops' clothing with Hollinger. A few years

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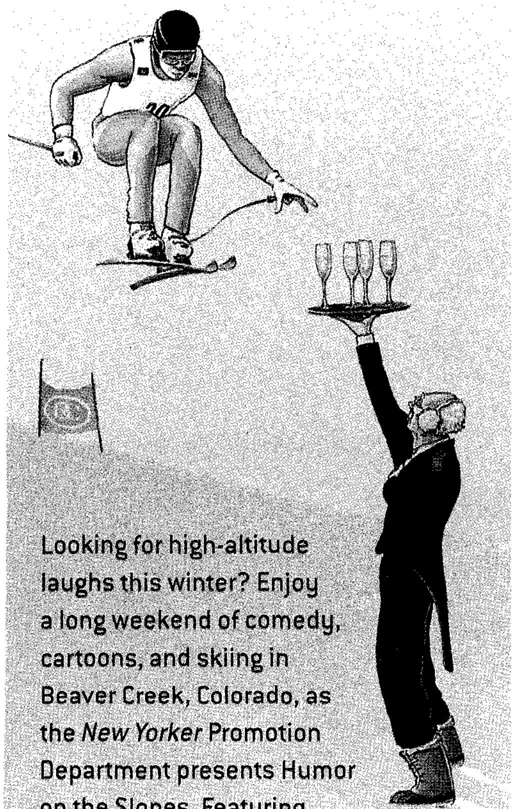

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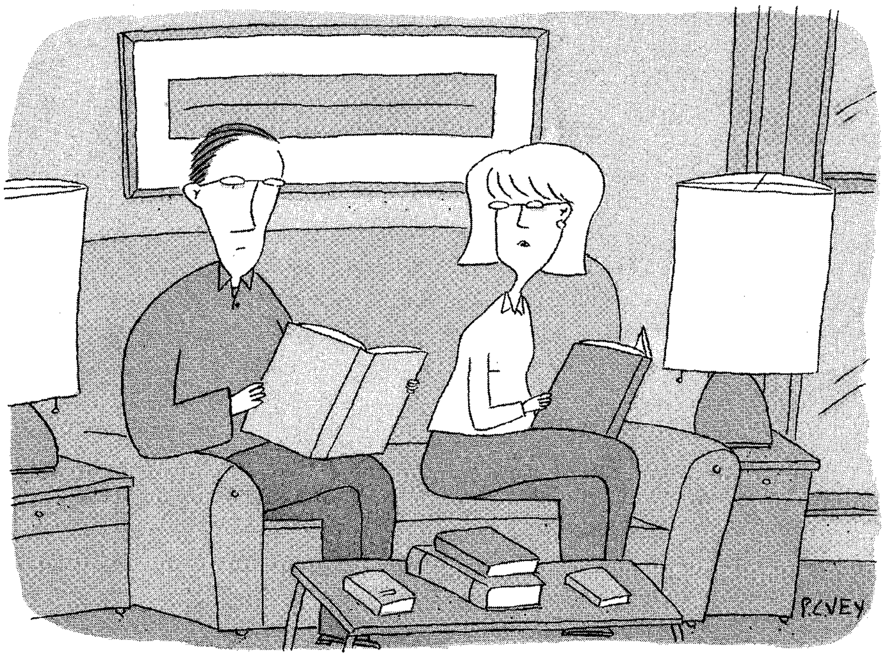
before, Hollinger had made a splash in the business by figuring out how to make priestly garments less punishing. "They were so hot and uncomfortable," Morton Hollinger explained to me. "The priests were really suffering." He had responded by inventing and patenting two improvements on required clerical attire: a shirt to replace the bulky dickey and collar worn by the Christian Brothers order, and the Perma-tach, a much more comfortable banded-collar shirt for priests. "The priests really went for it," Morton said. "That's how it works with inventions. First comes the need, then come the resources. That's what I told Steve. With the umbrella, there is a need."

Imperfect though umbrellas may be, they do have staying power: they have existed in nearly the same form since 1000 B.C., appearing in ancient Egypt, Greece, and China. Over the next few thousand years, umbrella design evolved: palm-leaf canopies were replaced with oiled silk, and then cotton, and then microfibre; whalebone and wood ribs gave way to steel and flexible fibreglass; stationary wooden shafts were updated to pencil-thin metal telescoping ones. But the need—or, at least, the impulse—to improve upon them has been around for almost as long. The United States Patent and Trademark Office, which, for patent purposes, groups umbrellas in Class 135—with tents, crutches, canes, and walkers—has more than three thousand active patents on umbrella-related inventions, including a weather-forecasting umbrella; one with a rain-measuring device; a luminous umbrella; a combined pet leash and umbrella; a strap-on umbrella for the pet; a mysterious and evil-sounding "multi-component electric stunning umbrella"; and Patent No. 20030155465, "a flying machine using umbrella-type devices."

There are so many people with ideas about umbrellas that the Patent Office has four full-time examiners assessing their claims. Totes Isotoner, which is the largest umbrella company in the country, stopped accepting unsolicited proposals several years ago. One of the problems, according to Ann Headley, the director of rain-product development for Totes, is that umbrellas are so ordinary that everyone thinks about them, and, because they're relatively simple, you don't need an advanced degree to imagine a way to redesign them, but it's difficult to come up with an umbrella idea that hasn't already been done. The three-section folding umbrella, for instance, which seemed so novel when it was first manufactured, in the nineteen-eighties, was actually patented almost a hundred years ago. Nevertheless, last year the Patent Office approved a hundred and sixty applications for Class 135 inventions; this



"If we're going to continue ignoring each other, we'll need a lot more reading material."

is about the number approved for inventions in Class 43—Fishing, Trapping, and Vermin Destroying—which includes sharper harpoons, stickier flypaper, and better mousetraps.

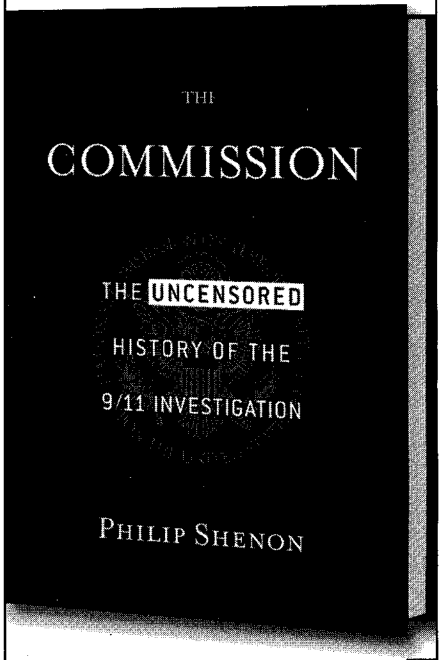
And still umbrellas are seriously flawed. They drip, they flip inside out, they snap in half, they poke bystanders in the eye. Their usable life span is sometimes as short as one big downpour, and then they transmogrify into unwieldy non-recyclable trash. In 2006, the design magazine *I.D.*, the Web site Treehugger, and the Sustainable Style Foundation sponsored a contest to address what they termed "the umbrella problem," which encompassed both the poor performance of umbrellas and the issue of their afterlife. In announcing the contest, *I.D.'s* editor-in-chief, Julie Lasky, noted, "Umbrellas suffer from design flaws that often lead to their premature and messy deaths and unwelcome burials in landfills." The finalists in the better-umbrella category were the Pollinate Umbrella (made of recycled materials and entirely biodegradable); the Penta, which collects rain so that it can be used later to water garden plants; and the Crayella (the eventual winner), which featured easy-to-repair ribs. (According to Crayella's designers, "Individuals can create micro-businesses that repair Crayellas quickly on the street, like offering a shoe-shine, and collect and repair discarded Crayellas for resale.") The second category called for "a couture garment constructed from former umbrellas." The winning entry was an evening gown made of salvaged umbrella canopies, with a faux-corset made of discarded umbrella ribs, designed by the aptly named Rainer Wolter.

The rewards for whoever improves the umbrella are substantial. The annual retail market in the United States alone is now three hundred and forty-eight million dollars—about thirty-three million umbrellas. The rest of the world, including many cultures where umbrellas are used both as rain protection and as sun shade, consumes many millions more. Most umbrellas are manufactured in China, largely in the provinces of Guangdong, Fujian, and Zhejiang. (Shangyu, in Zhejiang province, has more than a thousand umbrella factories.) Few artisanal umbrellas are made, but Hollinger was so convinced that his design was worthy he decided that if he didn't find a manufacturer interested in licensing it he would produce the umbrella himself. His mother, Myrna, a sculptor who works primarily in the medium of dried fish, said about him recently, "Steve does have an almost magical way of thinking. But he's also very disciplined. He can really follow it through."

The Hollinger Improved Umbrella—patent application 60/642,542—is teardrop-shaped: it has a rounded nose and a short tail, so it has a distinct front and back. The rounded nose and the shape of the dome optimize wind deflection around the canopy. Because it is elongated, it shields the user's legs from rain while he or she is walking. It is large, but the shape makes it narrow enough to allow umbrella-carrying pedestrians to walk side by side. A fabric gutter around the front rim captures and diverts rain so the flow off the dome doesn't land on the carrier's feet. One version of the design has a foot-long wind sock on top of the dome to release air pressure under the canopy, which makes it easier to walk into a wind. (Another version has a dozen wind socks, giving it the spikiness of a sea anemone.) The handle and the shank are wedge-shaped, so they are aerodynamic; the ribs, which are thin fibreglass, are enclosed within the canopy, so there are no eye-poking points along the edge.

The umbrella looks like a cross between a bike helmet and a sou'wester fisherman's hat—in fact, Hollinger made the pattern for his prototype using his bike helmet. His original model was made of silky black fabric with a fire-engine-red underside, which he liked because even in a rainstorm it would make the user feel as though it were a really bright day. He began the project with no background in textiles, industrial design, sewing, or aerodynamics, and only a passing grasp of physics, but, as he says, "I like to learn." As he began work on the umbrella, he booked some time with the person who runs M.I.T.'s wind tunnel, for a crash course in aerodynamics, and he studied Frisbee patents, to try to understand how air moves over objects. When he was in the most intense phase of inventing, Hollinger, who lives alone but has a busy social life, cancelled all his plans and left his apartment only to go to the bookstore at the Harvard Coop, because it had good

The Shocking Omissions and Distortions of the 9/11 Report



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coffee as well as legal and physics textbooks that he could look at for reference.

He knew what he thought the umbrella should be—a sleek, convex curve—but making it was tricky. Fabrics that seemed umbrella-like were often too thick for him to sew, and the material he liked the most, a luminous yellow rubbery synthetic, got stuck to his sewing machine. The hems of the different sections didn't seem to match up, no matter how many times he measured them. He ripped apart a score of umbrellas to cannibalize their ribs and stems. He threw out countless botched efforts but kept tracing the shape of his bicycle helmet on sheets of fabric, pinning them, stitching them, stretching them over the salvaged frames. "When I thought I had finally worked out the design, I was so excited!" he told me. "I drove over to my best friends' house that night, had them sign a nondisclosure agreement, and showed them the umbrella."

As he was telling me this, Hollinger fiddled with his bike helmet, which still had the paper-pattern shapes taped to it from its use as an umbrella template. At the time, we were in Hollinger's loft, which has brick walls and a huge picture window. It is minimally decorated in a conventional sense, but Hollinger has pieces of art (his own and friends') everywhere, and long shelves lining one side of the loft are loaded with material that he has collected either for use in his sculpture or simply because he liked it: empty anchovy tins, magic lanterns, porcupine quills, a spider in formaldehyde, antique hypodermic needles, rusty things that he has salvaged from Boston Harbor, an aluminum prosthetic leg with interesting-looking joints, leaves, spider webs, wooden explosives boxes, a preserved two-headed bird with three eyes ("a real prize," he said), and an extensive collection of old cloudy glass bottles.

The cumulative effect of all this is somewhat baroque. By contrast, Hollinger's own affect is sunny and collegiate. He is small and slim, with mad-scientist dark hair and eyebrows, fine features, and a charming smile. He could be one of Groucho Marx's best-looking relatives. He is forty-six years old and is invariably dressed in jeans, a T-shirt, some sort of unbuttoned plaid shirt, and sneakers. He does not spend all his time in front of the computer; he camps and hikes and keeps a banged-up motorboat in a marina in South Boston. While cruising in Boston Harbor a few years ago, he came upon an abandoned military base on an obscure island, and he is working on an art piece documenting the vegetation creeping back over the military compound. He started a free film series in the neighborhood, which is held in a park across from his apartment. (The movies are projected on a sheet of canvas.) He knows nearly everyone in the area, in part because he's very friendly and in part because he has been involved in community organizing and negotiation with the city to build more parks nearby and to preserve Fort Point Channel's historic character. He has also just written a screenplay called "The Ruby and the Prism," about an inventor named Frank who travels to Antarctica after a painful divorce in order to unravel some family secrets. Hollinger sometimes refers to a painful breakup in his own past, but the most explicit parallel between the screenplay and his life is, of course, Frank's profession. Hollinger plans to patent at least two of the inventions that Frank uses in the screenplay. He says he thinks it would be great to have them hit the market just as the movie is released.

As soon as Hollinger finished building a model of his umbrella, he filed a patent application. (Since applications take as long as three years to process, inventors approach manufacturers well before a patent has been granted or denied.)

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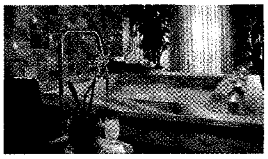

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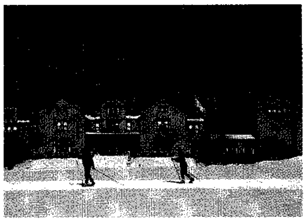

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He contacted Totes and Tumi—both companies declined to pursue it—and HandsOnToys, which is based in Lawrence, Massachusetts, outside Boston. HandsOnToys, or HOT, looked at the prototype and told him that it wanted to license the umbrella. The connection with HOT isn't as unlikely as it might seem: one of the company's founding partners, Arthur Ganson, is an old friend of Hollinger's and, more significant, also a sculptor and inventor. Ganson invented HOT's first product, Toobers and Zots, which are moldable foam tubes. That invention came about because, one day at a street festival, Ganson, who was slightly inebriated, saw someone carrying a long, skinny, squiggly balloon and thought that it was some kind of bendy foam—and a really neat toy. When he sobered up, he realized his error but decided to go ahead and invent moldable foam tubes. In 1994, the first year that Toobers and Zots were on the market, HOT sold nearly four million dollars' worth of them. It sold ten million dollars' worth the second year.

Rustam Booz and Andrew Farrar, who are also principal partners in HOT, were not actively looking to enter the rain-gear business, but they have a keen appreciation of serendipity. Besides Ganson's accidental invention of Toobers and Zots, they have profited greatly from another bit of chance. In 1999, they were débuting the Wiggly Giggly Ball, a toy for toddlers that made weird, funny noises when it rolled. They had registered late for the Atlanta Gift Show and, as a result, were relegated to the pet section—seemingly a disaster, until pet-toy buyers passing their booth happened to take note of the Wiggly Giggly and thought it might appeal to dogs. The next thing Booz and Farrar knew, they were selling two million Wiggly Giggly balls a year for pets, and had been offered eight million dollars to sell the product outright. The company now makes thirty different toys. The most popular product is Floam, a craft material made of small plastic beads suspended in a gluey medium. HOT first sold Floam via infomercials, then began distributing it through stores, where it has gone on to make a hundred million dollars worldwide.

"Floam opened our eyes to the direct-response marketing world," Farrar told me. "The direction we're going in now is to do research-and-development and licensing, not the manufacture of toys. So the product matters less than the process of marketing it. We've known Steve for a long time. He brought the umbrella to us, and it seemed like a good fit. We have very high hopes for it."

Not long ago, I joined Hollinger at a meeting with Booz and Farrar to see how the umbrella was progressing. It was a bitterly cold day, and the HOT office, in an old mill building, was drafty, although a fake fireplace made of Wiggly Giggly balls gave it a cozy feel. The meeting was supposed to include an unveiling of the first manufactured prototype of the umbrella, but the prototype, which had been made in Shangyu, had been waylaid en route from China by U.S. Customs, and wouldn't arrive in Massachusetts for a few more days. There were plenty of other umbrella issues to discuss, but, as we sat down, Hollinger excitedly announced that he had another invention he wanted to talk about—one of the products he'd written into "The Ruby and the Prism." "It's a complete redesign of a camping tent," he said. "It will be double-walled, and it'll have a layer of low-pressure gas or air between the two walls, so it'll always be warm. It could even be filled with argon, and you'd create a vacuum so that the temperature would remain constant."

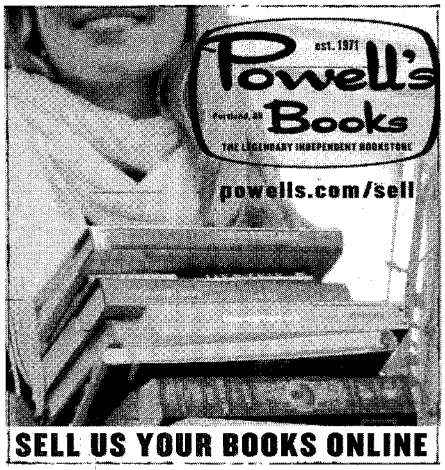
Farrar had been writing the meeting agenda on a whiteboard. He turned to Booz. They exchanged a tiny look, and then Farrar said to Hollinger, "We'd be very interested."

"It will definitely work," Hollinger said.

"It could even have an application as refugee housing," Booz added.

They talked about the tent for a moment, and agreed that Hollinger would show them his material once he had filed his patent application. Then they discussed the umbrella and talked about two possible competitors: the new Senz, an asymmetrical umbrella designed by Dutch university students that was just being marketed in the United States by Totes; and the Fanbrella, which folded into a flat tube.

"Speaking of which, where are we with names for our umbrella?" Booz asked. Hollinger showed them a list of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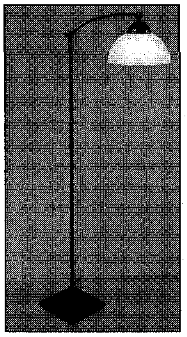
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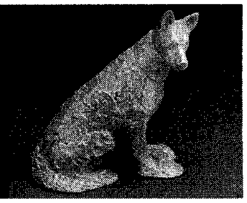
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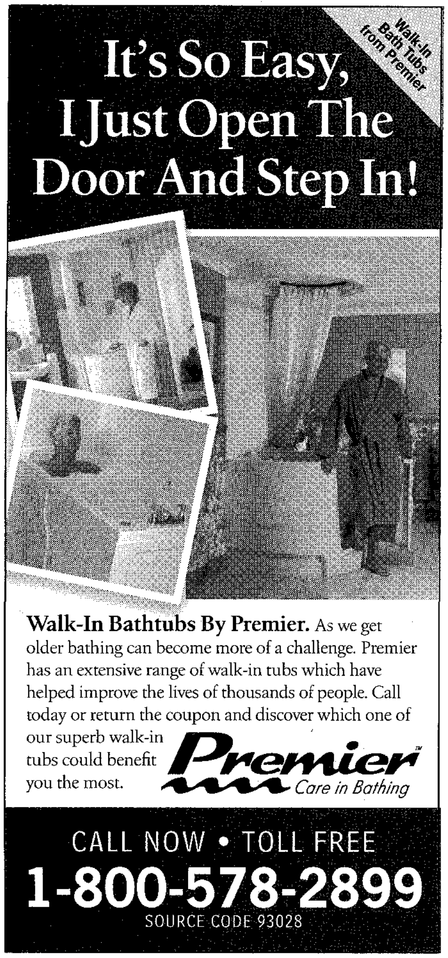
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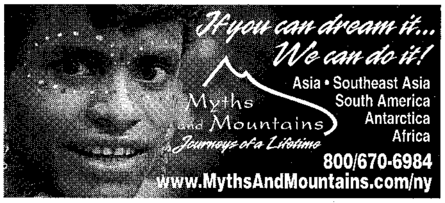
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names he had considered—Sou'wester, Windwalker, Stormwalker.

"I also have a possible patent for a golf umbrella called the Forewind," he said.

"Sounds too much like 'foreskin,'" Farrar said.

They talked for a moment about the two marketing approaches they were considering—through television infomercials and through high-end designers. The infomercials would appeal to people who want to buy something clever and useful, but the simple beauty and elegance of Hollinger's design would also appeal to the fashion world. Farrar mentioned that he had a friend who might be able to get them a meeting with a prominent designer, and that if she liked the umbrella she might be persuaded to do a version for the fashion market, which would be sold through her line of clothing. Booz mentioned the name Bella Brella. He said, "It has a nice ring to it."

"I like Forewind," Hollinger insisted.

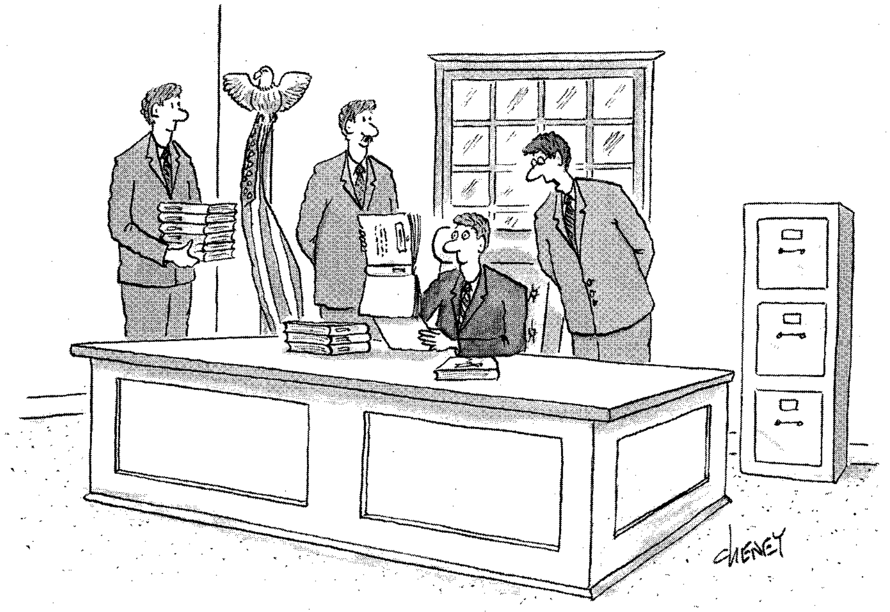
"I think the name Bella Brella is killer," Booz said. "You'd get noticed. But what you really want is to have rain break out at the U.S. Open and then have everyone open one of the umbrellas—*Poof! Poof! Poof!* Perfect."

They spent a while discussing the international patents they'd applied for, the fact that they were hoping to get the umbrella to magazine editors by this spring, and a meeting they were having the next week with J. D. Ma, who is based in suburban Chicago and works as a liaison between American companies and Chinese factories. "I've heard horror stories about some Chinese agent who was knocking off the products he was representing," Hollinger said, looking worried.

"J.D. is a good guy," Booz assured him. "We were introduced to him through Floam."

A few days later, the prototype was cleared through customs and arrived in Massachusetts. Hollinger told me that he was going to ask Booz if he could come see it—a formality that surprised me, but once an inventor licenses a product he or she often has little to do with it. In this case, Booz and Farrar have kept Hollinger quite involved. After he saw the umbrella, Hollinger wrote me an e-mail, saying, "My opinion: on the up side, it looks attractive (maybe more elegant than sleek), on the down side—it needs a lot of work. . . . Over all, I was pretty happy—mainly from just seeing it as coming to some kind of reality."

I finally saw the Hollinger Improved Umbrella the following week, at the meeting Booz and Farrar had with Ma, in his Chicago office. The umbrella was Ma's first foray into the rain-gear world. One of his companies, SLIS, Inc., oversees the production of many of HOT's toys, including the entire Floam


"As you can see, this stimulus package also includes babes."

line (Floam, Floambots, and Floamies). Ma's other company, Really Useful Products, makes his own line of novelty pens, party string, casino-chip key chains, and all manner of lighted objects (including safety wands, blinking-shamrock bracelets, and miniature reading lights that clip onto your ear). Ma is a tall, genial man with an explosive laugh. When Booz pulled the umbrella out of his hand luggage, Ma took one look and roared, "Oh, the shape is there! I feel confident!"

He held the umbrella open over the conference table. It was made of shiny black fabric with a pale-yellow underside, shaped like a dewdrop, with a high dome and an elongated tail. The factory had tooled the handle wrong, so it was attached backward, and the stays were twisted, and there hadn't been enough time to finish the grip, so there was only a nub of white plastic where a soft foam cushion would eventually go, and the handsome brass button, which was supposed to go on the hub on top of the dome, was missing; a work in progress, for sure, but you could still see in it the hand of an artist sketching a pleasing shape that could skim through the wind, raindrops skidding off it.

Ma twirled the umbrella in his hand, and it dipped and fluttered. "I think this is for fashion people," he said, cheerfully. "This is for New York people."

"We'd like it to be for one in ten people," Farrar said.

Over the next few weeks, Booz and Ma went to Shangyu to visit the factory, to insure that it made the necessary changes to the prototype before producing any more umbrellas, and Farrar met with a company in New York that might work on an infomercial to launch the umbrella. They had not decided on a price, and they still had not settled on a name. In the meantime, Hollinger had been buying up all the Internet domain names they might possibly use. He was also preparing a provisional patent on his vacuum tent, and had begun work on the other invention from his screenplay—a device that could resolve images recorded in ice, based on his theory that light leaves visual information in the crystals as they form. As he explained it to me, a piece of ice could be treated with a chemical so that it could hold an image just the way photographic paper does, so if you had a piece of ice outside that had been prepared with the chemical, you would be able to see a sort of movie of everything that had ever happened to the ice, or near the ice, or maybe everything that had ever happened, ever. "The only far-fetched part is the assumption that diffused sources of light recorded without a lens could somehow be analyzed and reconstructed," Hollinger wrote to me recently. "I'm not saying that's impossible—but that is the tough part." He was also making some new sculptures for his next solo show. His last show was called "Atomic" (each sculpture was named either for one of the nuclear tests in the nineteen-fifties and sixties or for one of the islands that was used for target practice). Most of the pieces, which were constructed in old explosives boxes, moved in some way, using solar power. He said that these new pieces would be as fragile as clouds, suspended on armatures as fine as hair, and they could be moved by even the slightest breath of wind.

Hollinger told me that he was impatient to see the umbrella on the street and hoped HOT would manage to get it out by this spring, as the company was promising, but that he was busy enough to keep his mind off it and wait.

I mentioned that even though the Hollinger Improved Umbrella seemed to solve all the major umbrella problems, like wind resistance and dripping edges and snapped shanks and broken ribs, the one thing that his invention hadn't addressed was the problem of losing your umbrella. He said that someone had recently patented a two-part device that attached to your umbrella and to your key chain, and if you walked too far away from your umbrella your key chain would beep, alerting you to the fact that you had left your umbrella behind. He said that he thought it was a good invention, one he felt he couldn't improve upon. "You could try to improve your memory," he said. "Otherwise, I don't think there's anything you could do." ♦

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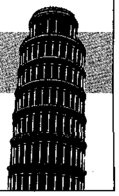

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PROFILES

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

How Stephen Schwarzman became private equity's designated villain.

BY JAMES B. STEWART

On June 18, 2007, Stephen A. Schwarzman, the chairman and chief executive of the Blackstone Group, and his driver approached the Fifth Avenue entrance of the New York Public Library. Schwarzman, a member of the library's board, was being honored that night. To his dismay, television reporters and cameramen were milling on the steps and the sidewalk. He evaded them by using a side entrance. A TV cameraman managed to penetrate the cocktail party that preceded the ceremony, and Schwarzman was startled when the glare of a camera-mounted spotlight hit him in the face.

In the previous few weeks, he had become the designated villain of an era on Wall Street—an era of rapacious capitalists and heedless self-indulgence that had driven the Dow Jones Industrial Average to new highs, along with the prices of luxury real estate and contemporary art, while the incomes of ordinary Americans stagnated or fell. Blackstone, the partnership that Schwarzman founded, in 1985, with Peter G. Peterson, Secretary of Commerce under Richard Nixon and a former chairman and C.E.O. of Lehman Brothers, was a new type of financial institution: a manager of so-called alternative assets, such as private-equity, real-estate, and hedge funds—esoteric vehicles that barely existed when Blackstone began but now accounted for trillions in assets. Most of the investments came from corporate and public pension funds, endowments of universities and other nonprofit institutions, insurance companies, and rich people. Blackstone was the world's largest manager of these alternative assets, with $88 billion. Its investors included Dartmouth College, Indiana University, the University of Texas, the University of Illinois, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and the Ohio Public Employee Retirement System. It had taken control of a hundred and twelve companies, with a combined value of nearly $200 billion. It had just completed what was at the time the largest private-equity buyout ever, the purchase, for $39 billion, of Equity Office Properties, and was on the verge of acquiring Hilton Hotels.

Blackstone was also about to become the largest private-equity firm to offer shares to the public. A week before the library tribute, the company disclosed, as required by the Securities and Exchange Commission, that Schwarzman would receive $677.2 million in cash from the public offering and that he would retain shares worth an estimated $7.8 billion, making him one of the richest men in the country. Coming soon after the lavish and widely chronicled sixtieth-birthday party that Schwarzman had given himself in February, an unflattering profile on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*, and strident calls from Congress to raise taxes on private-equity funds like Blackstone's, the disclosures could only tarnish the public offering.

Nevertheless, investors were eager to buy shares. On June 21st, a heavily oversubscribed public offering was priced at thirty-one dollars a share, at the top of the projected range, causing Blackstone to be valued at $31 billion—not far behind the venerable Lehman Brothers. The next day, Blackstone shares, trading under the symbol BX, opened at $36.45 and closed slightly lower, at $35.06. Schwarzman's friend James B. (Jimmy) Lee, Jr., a vice-chairman at J. P. Morgan Chase, sent him a congratulatory e-mail:

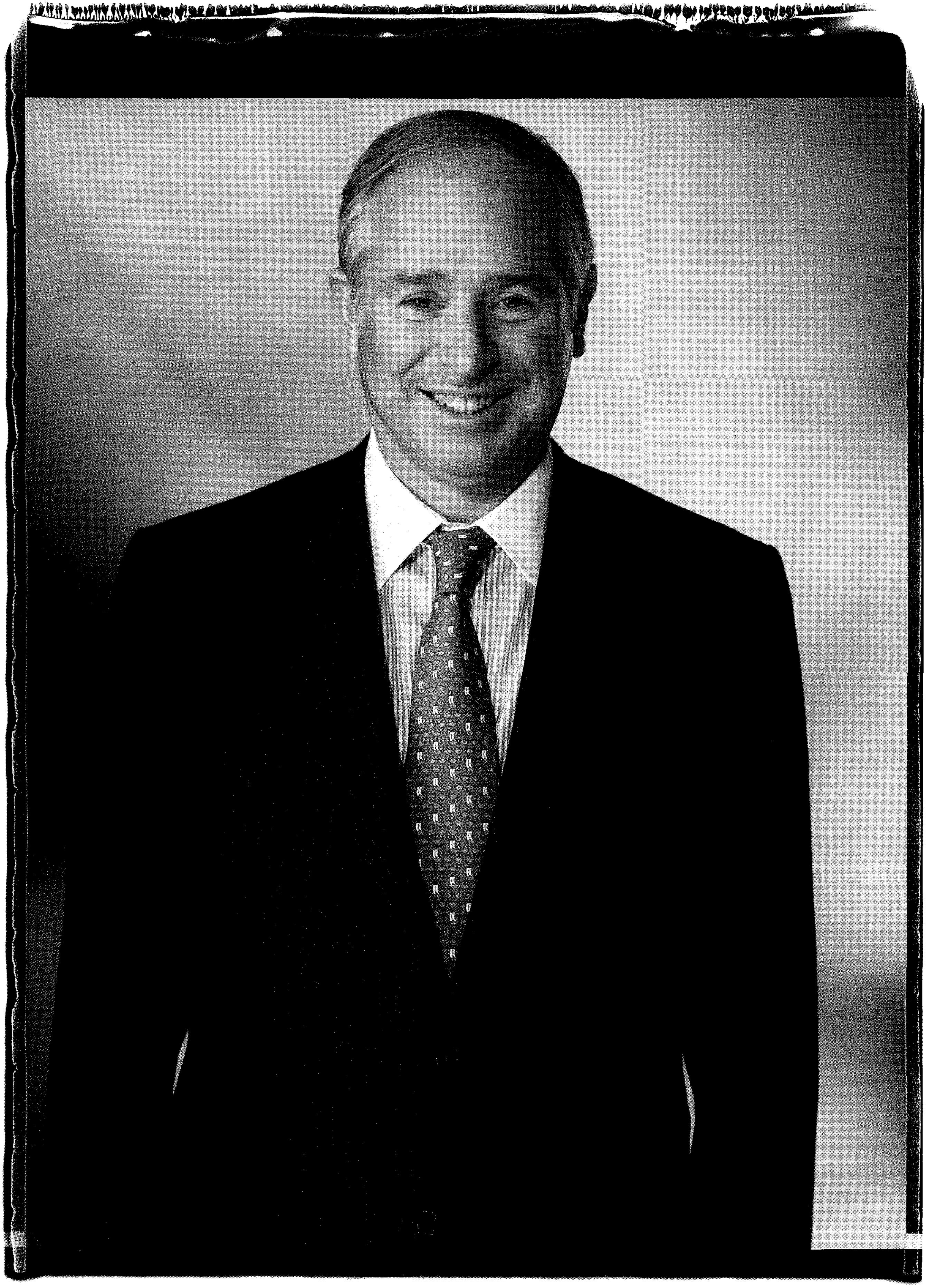
> You were like Indiana Jones over the last few weeks. . . . They rolled giant boulders at you . . . fired poison darts at you . . . threw you into that giant snake pit . . . and yet you still found the grail, and got the blonde. . . . Bravo.

Schwarzman had demonstrated extraordinary timing. Just days before, two Bear Stearns hedge funds holding mortgage-backed securities collapsed—the first tremors of what became a full-blown credit crisis. By the end of the year, major financial institutions had recorded losses on mortgages and related financial instruments of more than a hundred billion dollars. The chiefs of Merrill Lynch and Citigroup lost their jobs. Citigroup, Merrill, Bear Stearns, Morgan Stanley, and UBS turned in near-desperation to sovereign wealth funds (funds held by governments) and rich investors in the Middle East and Asia for capital infusions.

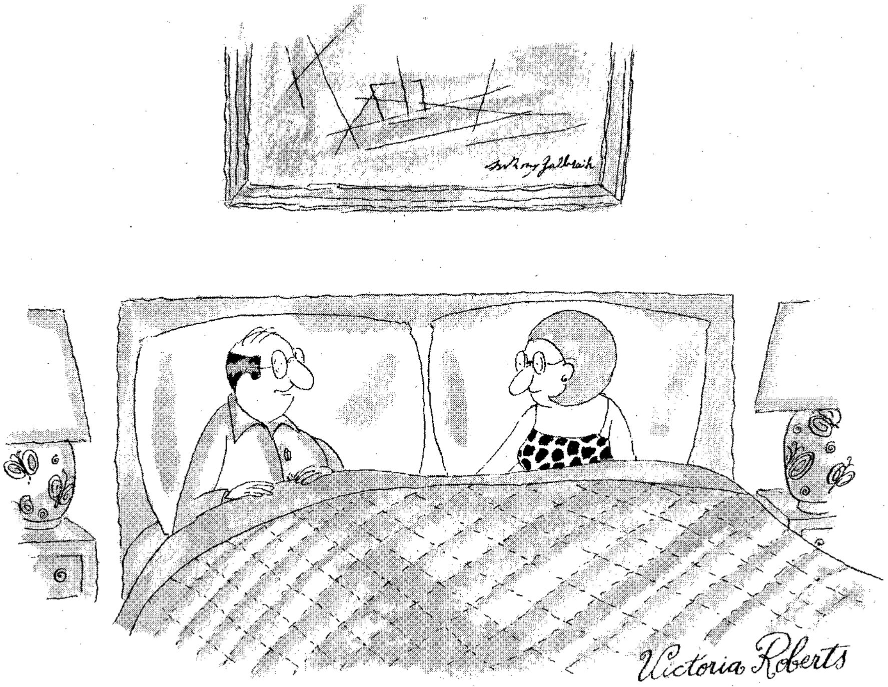
In this chaotic environment, Blackstone had managed to avoid nearly all the pitfalls of subprime mortgages and mortgage-backed securities. It specializes in commercial, not residential, real estate. Indeed, its hedge funds are designed to profit from market turmoil, and the enormous assets that it manages deliver steady fees in good markets and bad. The stock peaked on its first day of trading, however; by mid-January, its value had been cut almost in half.

Schwarzman still had his cash from the offering, which turned out to be $684 million, but his Blackstone stake, worth $8.83 billion after the first day, was worth just $4.62 billion.

Schwarzman has made himself an easy target for critics of Wall Street greed and conspicuous consumption. He lives in splendor in Manhattan, and he has an expanding collection of trophy residences that are lavish even by the current standards of Wall Street. In May, 2000, Schwarzman paid $37 million—reportedly a record sum at the time for a Manhattan co-op—for a thirty-five-room triplex on Park Avenue that was once owned by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. In 2003, he paid $20.5 million for Four Winds, the former E. F. Hutton estate in Florida, which occupies a choice spit of land between the ocean and the Intracoastal waterway. Designed by the Palm Beach architect Maurice Fatio, the thirteen-thousand-square-foot, British-



"You know what? I don't feel like a wealthy person," Schwarzman says. Photograph by Mary Ellen Mark.



"When I don't dream, I feel as if I'd forgotten to put out the garbage."

colonial-style estate was a designated historic landmark; local residents were startled when Schwarzman had the house razed. The ensuing fourteen-month wrangle between Schwarzman and his New York architects and the Landmarks Preservation Commission filled countless pages of testimony. It turned out that Schwarzman had got approval for a proposed expansion, and, as the house was dismantled, workers had numbered and stored everything so that it could be rebuilt in an expanded form. In 2006, he paid $34 million for a Federal-style house, on eight acres on Mecox Bay, in the Hamptons, that was previously owned by the Vanderbilt heir Carter Burden.

Schwarzman also owns a coastal estate in Saint-Tropez and a beachfront property in Jamaica. He typically spends summer weekends and August in East Hampton; July in Saint-Tropez; and winter weekends in Palm Beach. His children use the house in Jamaica; he rarely goes there. The five properties and their renovations appear to have cost Schwarzman at least a hundred and twenty-five million dollars. "I love houses," he told me recently. "I'm not sure why."

Whatever his indulgences, Schwarzman has always drawn a strict line between personal expenses and Blackstone's business operations; colleagues say that he keeps a close watch on office spending. The company's offices, on Park Avenue, are furnished with slightly threadbare traditional rugs and furniture and a mixture of modest prints and photographs. (The offices are scheduled to be renovated later this year.) Blackstone does not own a corporate jet. Instead, it uses Schwarzman's private jet. (In 2006, the company paid him $1.54 million for the privilege.) Schwarzman must approve any other chartered flights. Partners pay for their own lunches; there is a twenty-five-dollar limit on dinner expenses for employees working at night. Even subscriptions to the *Wall Street Journal* are deemed personal expenses, and all the partners pay for their own. One exception has always been company events; Blackstone has a long history of opulent anniversary and closing dinners, often at the Four Seasons, which is referred to by some as the Blackstone cafeteria. Still, until recently Schwarzman had trouble getting a prime table in the Grill Room at lunch. According to a friend of both men, when Schwarzman asked Peterson why, his co-founder replied, "It takes more than just money."

Another traditional measure of wealth is charitable activities and donations, and Schwarzman's philanthropic activities have received wide notice. With a hundred and fifty million dollars from the public-offering proceeds, Blackstone established the Blackstone Foundation. Schwarzman has contributed to or raised money for a long list of nonprofit institutions, including the Frick Collection, the Whitney Museum, Phoenix House, the Red Cross, the Inner-City Scholarship Fund, the American Museum of Natural History, New York City Outward Bound, the Asia Society, and the Central Park Conservancy. His competitive instincts are as keen here as in business; he told me that every fund-raiser that he has chaired or at which he has been the honoree has set a new record. He is on the board not only of the New York Public Library but of the Frick and of New York City Ballet. Jimmy Lee jokes that his friend has received more accolades and raised more money for the Catholic Archdiocese of New York than any other Jew; Edward Cardinal Egan is a close friend. (Schwarzman has also raised money for the American Jewish Committee.) As chairman of the board of trustees of the Kennedy Center, in Washington, he shares a box every year with the President and the center's honorees.

In America, board memberships and contributions to worthy causes in the arts and education have traditionally helped cleanse a man of any taint of new money and can temper populist resentment of great wealth. For someone of Schwarzman's wealth and business prominence, affiliations with boards—which are stocked with the lawyers, bankers, and business executives who are Blackstone's clients, potential clients, or advisers to them—are all but essential. A board member is expected to make contributions that roughly correlate to the size of his personal fortune. In Schwarzman's case, this aspect of the pact has generated considerable controversy and ill will, especially given his overt displays of wealth.

Schwarzman pledged ten million dollars to the Kennedy Center, but the pledge was to be fulfilled over ten years, which gave it a present value significantly lower than ten million. According to a fellow member of the library board, "He has given, but not remotely what he could. A big capital campaign is coming up. We hope that he'll give very generously."

One of Schwarzman's most controversial proposed gifts was to Yale, his alma mater, which, during the late nineties, agreed to name the freshman dining commons after Schwarzman in return for $17 million. Some people at Yale thought the commitment was in hand, but it emerged that Schwarzman's gift would actually be a contribution to one of Blackstone's investment partnerships on Yale's behalf. No money would change hands until the fund was liquidated, and there was a risk that the investment might be worth far less than $17 million (although there was also the possibility that it would be worth more). Yale balked at trading a significant naming opportunity for what it considered a speculative commitment, and Schwarzman did not give the money. (The naming opportunity remains.)

The president of Yale, Richard C. Levin, won't discuss the incident other than to say, "We're still good friends." He points out that Schwarzman has raised money for Yale as a member of the executive committee of the current fund-raising campaign and was co-chair of the New York region during the previous one. "He's been supportive and enthusiastic." Yale, of course, is hoping for generosity in the future. Levin says, "Now that he's reached a new level of liquidity, we hope that he'll become a world-class philanthropist."

Schwarzman's longtime friend Jeffrey Rosen, a Yale classmate who is now a deputy chairman at Lazard, defended Schwarzman's cautious approach. "He believes he can compound the money at a higher rate than an institution can. By reinvesting it now, he'll have more to give away. In five years, who knows how much he could have? Steve is at the dawn of his philanthropic stage. He'll mature into this."

Schwarzman himself says, "I'm thinking through how I want to approach that area of philanthropy. Assuming that Blackstone does well over time, and the credit markets recover, I'll have significant resources for charitable activities."

Schwarzman has seemed reluctant to embrace the time-honored relationship between wealth, class, good works, and self-restraint. Richard Beattie, a prominent lawyer who is also a longtime friend, told me, "Steve laughs about the old Wasp image—he doesn't buy into that old-money standard. He thinks it's ridiculous." Schwarzman may be rethinking that view, however; he says that he is pondering a major gift, one likely to silence his critics, but that it would be premature to say more.

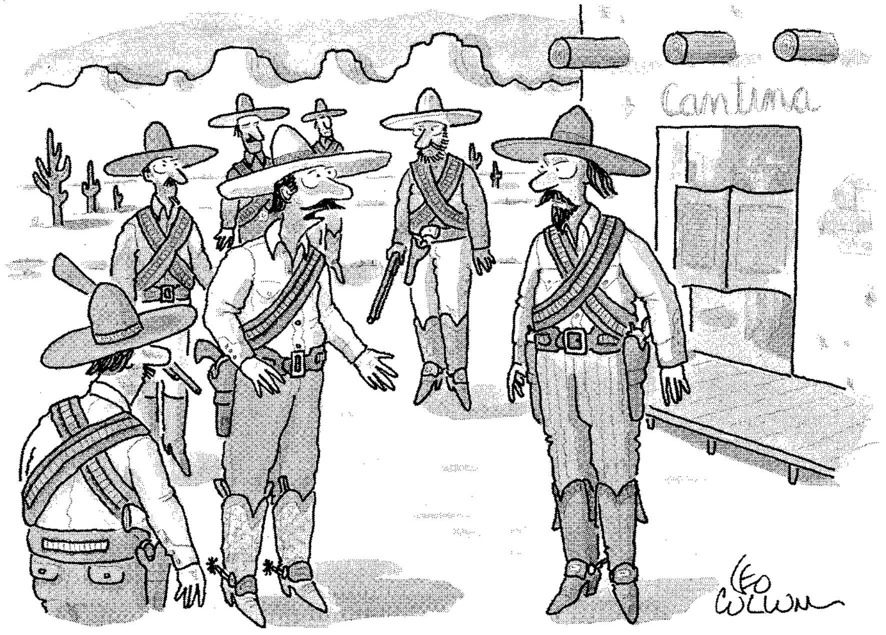
Schwarzman's many friends stoutly defend his right to spend or give away his wealth as he sees fit. I spoke to a number of people who attended the sixtieth-birthday party; most felt that, as one friend put it, "it's his money, and he should be able to do what he wants with it." He added, "Isn't this America?"

I knew Schwarzman in the nineteen-eighties, when he was at Lehman Brothers, but I hadn't seen him for twenty years. Late last year, we met in the Blackstone offices on several occasions. Although he has gained weight, and his dark hair is now streaked with gray, he has the same dark eyes, and he exudes a restless intensity and an enthusiasm that belies his age. Before we sat down, he showed me around his office, an ample corner space, but modest by the standards of chief executives. Half of his desk is crowded with family photographs. Behind his chair, along the windows facing Park Avenue, are scores of photographs of him with prominent people, including President Bush and Laura Bush, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Cardinal Egan, Michael Bloomberg, Colin Powell, President Hu Jintao of China, Bruce Wasserstein, and the 2006 honorees at the Kennedy Center—Andrew Lloyd Webber, Zubin Mehta, Dolly Parton, Smokey Robinson, and Steven Spielberg.

As we began talking, he seemed defensive. Nearly everyone, including Peterson, had advised him to stay out of the news and to avoid reporters, but many of his friends and associates had already spoken to me, and he seemed to warm up when I asked him to recount his path from suburban Philadelphia boy to Wall Street billionaire. He has a vivid memory for details, whether it involves an anecdote from his first job on Wall Street or a troubled buyout or his first merger.

Schwarzman and his younger brothers, Mark and Warren, who are twins, grew up in the suburb of Abington; his mother still lives nearby. Schwarzman's father came from a comfortably middle-class family of merchants in Philadelphia; his mother grew up poor, in the Bronx. Her father died when she was ten, and her mother worked to support the family. "My father was very bright," Schwarzman says. "My mother had enormous drive. Put that together, and that's my gene pool."

Schwarzman attended Abington High School, where he played basketball and ran track. His height—he is five feet



"You're kidding! I thought it was one-bandolier Friday."

eight—worked against him, but he says he learned that by working and training harder than anyone else "you gain an advantage at the margin." He ran sprints and cross-country. He likes to tell a story about how, early in one cross-country race, he slipped and broke his wrist. Determined to set a record for the course, he got up and kept running, his arm tucked against his side, and set the record. At the finish, his coach asked him what was wrong. "I broke my wrist," Schwarzman said, then went into shock and was rushed to the hospital. In 2004, he donated a new football stadium to Abington High School—the Stephen A. Schwarzman Stadium.

Schwarzman's father and grandfather ran a drygoods store, Schwarzmans, which sold bed and bath linens, draperies, and housewares. When Stephen was fifteen, he approached his father with a plan to open more stores and expand into a national chain, "like Sears."

"That's a bad idea," his father told him. So he suggested expanding in Pennsylvania. Finally, he pleaded with him to open just one more store. All his ideas were rejected. "I'm very happy with my life as it is," his father explained as Schwarzman kept badgering him. "I've got enough money to send you and your brothers to college. We've got a nice house and two cars. I don't want any more in life." Schwarzman found this incomprehensible. He turned to his mother. "That's your father," she said. "He's happy!"

Schwarzman's father retired at the age of seventy, after selling the store. It closed ten years later, the victim of mounting competition from national chains like Bed Bath & Beyond.

"I admired him," Schwarzman said of his father. "He knew what he wanted and he achieved it. But that's not for me. I wanted a much bigger stage. I didn't know what it was, but I knew something had to be out there."

When Schwarzman arrived at Yale, in 1965, he was drawn to superiors—certain professors and administrators—and to students who shared his sense of ambition and were likely to get ahead. "I've always been comfortable with people who run things, whether it was the principal of my high school or the president of the university," Schwarzman told me. "I empathize with their problems, with their issues. I ask myself, How would I do that? It's very easy if you think about what they think. It comes naturally to me." His academic record wasn't distinguished, and he often seemed impatient with intellectual pursuits. In his senior year, he was chosen by Skull and Bones.

The summer before his sophomore year, while recovering from a touch-football injury, Schwarzman decided to study classical music, a subject about which he knew almost nothing. He started with Gregorian chants and worked through the repertoire chronologically, listening to recordings and reading related texts. He studied every major work and every major conductor, often spending, he claims, eight to ten hours a day listening to the stereo system. By late summer, he had reached Tchaikovsky. He was especially captivated by the ballet music from "The Sleeping Beauty." "I'd close my eyes and listen, and I could see dancing," he recalled. Back at Yale that fall, he shared his newfound enthusiasm with the physicist Horace Taft, the master of Davenport College, where Schwarzman lived, and his wife, Mary Jane, who loved the ballet. The couple grew fond of him, and Mary Jane tutored him on the fine points of ballet and arranged trips to performances for him.

There were no dance performances on Yale's all-male campus, but the New England women's colleges were filled with aspiring dancers. It occurred to Schwarzman that with these women he could stage a dance performance, and charge admission. "Put attractive women in tights and you'd sell out," he said. He got in touch with Walter Terry, the dance critic for *Saturday Review*, and persuaded him to attend. He scheduled the performance for a weeknight, when nothing else was competing for students' attention. The event sold out, and Terry wrote about it in *Saturday Review*, in the issue of March 29, 1969. In the article, Schwarzman, asked about his future, said, "I can't afford the arts right now. That takes money. So I'm going to a school of business administration."

Schwarzman had majored in Intensive Culture and Behavior, an interdisciplinary subject, and hadn't taken a single economics or accounting course. Law school or business school seemed a logical next step, but he had little sense of where either would lead. During his senior year, he had sent a letter to W. Averell Harriman, the wartime Ambassador to Russia and former governor of New York, who was serving as the President's representative at the Paris peace talks. "There weren't that many people in that era to admire, and I wrote him a letter saying I admired him and wanted to meet him," Schwarzman recalled. Harriman, a fellow Skull and Bones man, invited him to lunch at his town house, on the Upper East Side, occasionally interrupting their talk to take calls from Cyrus Vance, in Paris. According to Schwarzman, Harriman asked him, "Young man, are you independently wealthy?"

"No, sir, I'm not."

"Well, I am the son of a very rich man, which has made an enormous difference—that's the reason you're seeing me. If you have any interest in the political world, I advise you to become independently wealthy yourself."

Schwarzman applied to several law and business schools. He was accepted at Harvard Business School. Feeling that he needed a break, he asked to defer his admission for a year.

To earn some extra money, Schwarzman worked for the Yale alumni office and then the admissions office. Larry Noble, a 1953 graduate who worked in the alumni office, introduced Schwarzman to others in Yale's extensive alumni network, including his classmate Bill Donaldson, who was running an investment-banking firm, Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette. (Donaldson went on to become chairman and C.E.O. of the New York Stock Exchange and chairman of the S.E.C.) Schwarzman waited in the reception area for half an hour, watching as young bankers hurried past in shirtsleeves, followed by secretaries wearing short skirts and big gold earrings. "It seemed fast-moving, intense," Schwarzman recalled. "Everyone seemed happy." When Donaldson asked him why he wanted to work at the firm, Schwarzman replied, "Mr. Donaldson, I don't even know what you do. But if you have such great-looking girls and intense guys then I want to do it." Schwarzman was hired at a salary of ten thousand five hundred dollars, which, by his account, was "five hundred dollars more than anyone else in my class at Yale." He quickly realized that he was unqualified. He left after six months, but, before leaving, he had lunch with Donaldson. "I'm sorry I didn't make more of a contribution," Schwarzman recalls saying. "If you don't mind my asking, why did you hire me and waste your money?"

"It's simple," Donaldson replied. "One day you'll be the head of this firm."

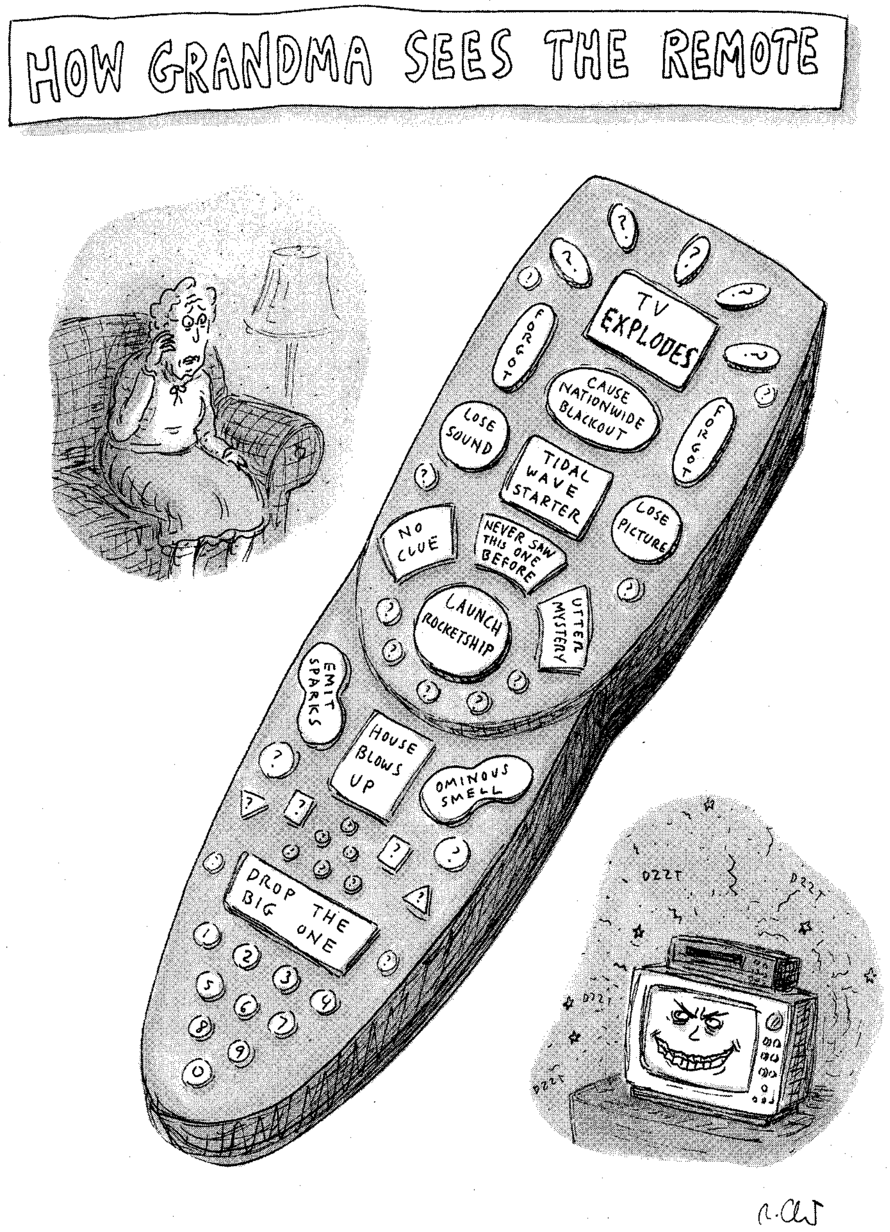
"You must be kidding. Why?"

"It's my instinct. You have something special and I want to bet on it."

(Donaldson says that he has no recollection of such an incident, but he does recall telling Schwarzman that if he returned to the firm he would do well.)

Schwarzman met his first wife, Ellen Philips, during his second year at Harvard Business School, where she worked as a researcher and helped grade essays. She was the daughter of Jesse Philips, a wealthy Ohio industrialist. They were married in 1971 and had two children, Elizabeth, in 1976, and Edward, in 1979. Looking for a job after graduating, Schwarzman was shocked when both Goldman Sachs and First Boston turned him down, but he had offers from Lehman Brothers and Morgan Stanley. He claims that he was only the second Jew to get a job offer from Morgan Stanley, but he chose Lehman. Being at Lehman worked to his advantage. As one former Lehman banker describes the firm, "It was survival of the fittest. You produced the business and then you fought over the proceeds. It was every man for himself." Bruce Wasserstein, then at First Boston, and soon to be regarded as the leading mergers-and-acquisitions banker on Wall Street, said to Eric Gleacher, the head of M.&A. at Lehman, and Schwarzman, "I don't understand why all of you at Lehman Brothers hate each other. I get along with both of you." To which Schwarzman replied, "If you were at Lehman Brothers, we'd hate you, too."

Tropicana, an important Lehman client that was merging with Beatrice Foods, asked Schwarzman to represent the company in the sale, even though Schwarzman had never worked on a merger. (A Tropicana executive had been impressed by a bond presentation Schwarzman made, and felt that, despite his inexperience, he could explain complicated aspects of a merger to a relatively unsophisticated board.) The $488-million deal, in 1978, marked Schwarzman's emergence as a lead banker in M.&A., a field that was growing, along with junk-bond empires and a new entrepreneurial breed, the corporate raider.



Schwarzman was too new and too young to rival M.&A. strategists like Wasserstein, but his work habits and his competitive drive impressed clients and other bankers and lawyers in that tightly knit world. A former Lehman colleague recalls a concert at Carnegie Hall that he and Schwarzman attended with their wives. As soon as the lights dimmed and the music began, Schwarzman opened his briefcase, pulled out a sheaf of papers, and began working. Though his wife chastised him at intermission, he resumed working as soon as they returned to their seats. He typically was awake by 4:30 or 5 A.M., and often worked until 10 P.M.—a habit that continues today. Schwarzman was a showman as well. Another Lehman colleague told me that once, when he and Schwarzman were to call on Harry Gray, then the acquisitive chief executive of the industrial conglomerate United Technologies, based in Hartford, they travelled to the meeting by helicopter and limousine. When the colleague asked why they didn't simply drive or take the train, Schwarzman replied, "You have to make an impression. 'If you want my time, I'm so valuable this is how I travel.'" According to Schwarzman, Gray and United Technologies became a significant Lehman Brothers client.

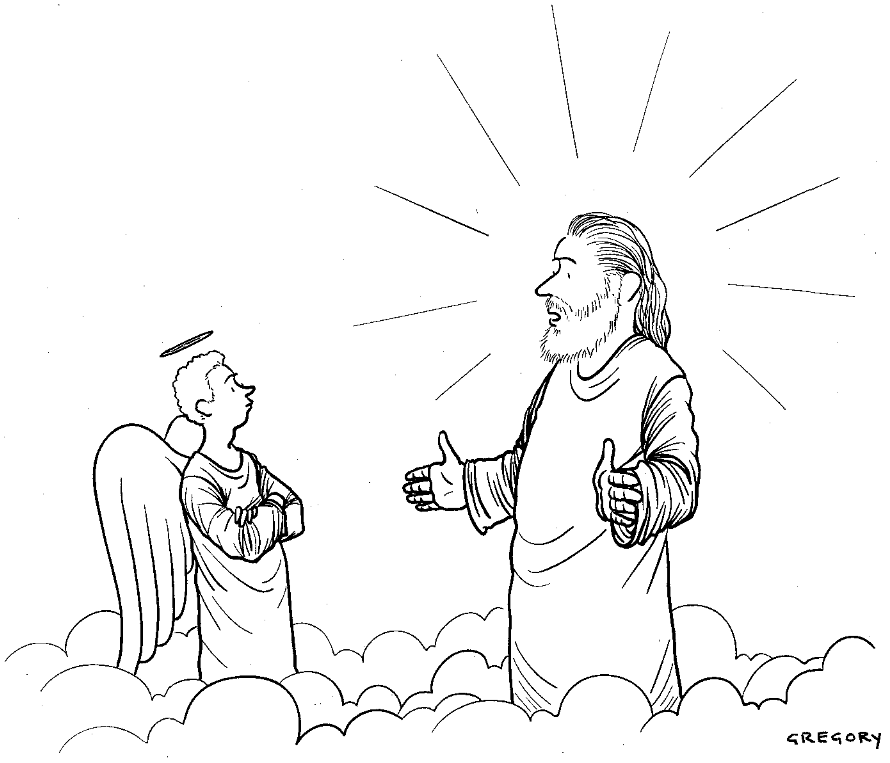
Schwarzman says that he consistently

earned the highest bonus of anyone in his Lehman Brothers "class." He was made a partner in 1978, just six years after arriving at the firm. In 1980, the Sunday *Times* ran a profile of Schwarzman, with the headline "STEPHEN SCHWARZMAN, LEHMAN'S MERGER MAKER." In the office the next day, he was beaming and brandishing a copy. "He loved the publicity, loved the attention," a friend recalls. At Lehman's annual firm outing that spring, at a country club, his colleagues had a copy of the article printed on a framed mirror, so that Schwarzman's face would be reflected whenever he read it.

In 1973, Peter G. Peterson joined Lehman as vice-chairman, and soon afterward became chairman and C.E.O. In addition to having been Nixon's Secretary of Commerce, Peterson, a former chairman and chief executive of Bell & Howell, had headed Nixon's Council on International Economic Policy and was a prominent member of the Council on Foreign Relations—a man very much in the postwar mold of an Averell Harriman, a John J. McCloy, or a Nelson Rockefeller, moving easily between private business and public service. He was sought after more for his contacts and his influence than for his business skills; in his work for Nixon, he had travelled incessantly and had got to know the chief executives of the world's major businesses, often dropping their names in conversation. Peterson was a self-made man of an earlier generation, who had grown up in Kearney, Nebraska. His parents were Greek immigrants who ran a restaurant, where Peterson worked throughout his youth. He remembers people lining up at soup kitchens during the Depression and begging for food at the restaurant.

After investing much of his life savings in an equity stake in Lehman, Peterson discovered, three weeks after his arrival at the firm, that Lehman's head trader, Lew Glucksman, had run up millions of dollars in losses, drastically depleting the firm's capital and calling into question its ability to survive. The firm was in disarray. Recruited to help build up the roster of corporate clients, Peterson was suddenly made chief executive, mainly because, as one partner recalls, "he hadn't been around long enough for anyone to hate him."

Peterson's instinct was to try to reconcile the warring factions. Urged by many to fire Glucksman, Peterson argued that Glucksman was a talented trader who had had only one bad year; instead, he named him to the management committee, and later promoted him to co-C.E.O. Peterson set up task forces to evaluate the firm's strengths, weaknesses, and business plan, and asked Schwarzman to serve on one.



"Hey, that's just one omniscient guy's opinion."

Schwarzman, who was twenty-seven, again demonstrated an extraordinary ability to ingratiate himself with an older man—Peterson was forty-seven—in a position of authority. Peterson recalls that Schwarzman was "extremely gifted, probably one of the two or three most gifted people I've met in the M.&A. world. More important, he had balance. He could make the major judgment calls. He knew when a C.E.O. needed to be called. He could gain their confidence better than anyone. I could bring in the business, but I couldn't implement it. He was great at this, great to work with. He'd carry out the deal, and keep me informed." Peterson recalls that his goal was to get to No. 2 or No. 3 in the M.&A. rankings. "I'd invite in a C.E.O.," Peterson said. "I'd meet him, and then I'd invite Steve in for lunch. We got a lot of business this way."

In 1983, Glucksman organized a luncheon to celebrate Peterson's tenth anniversary at Lehman. The firm gave him a Henry Moore sketch, and Glucksman spoke enthusiastically of their relationship as co-C.E.O.s. By then, Glucksman's trading operation was making record profits, and Peterson was credited with saving the firm. *Business Week* had run a cover story on the firm's resurrection: "Back from the Brink Comes Lehman Brothers." Five weeks later, Glucksman summoned Peterson to his office and told him that he had the votes to force him out. "I have to run the place by myself," Glucksman insisted. Peterson asked if he could at least be given an opportunity to resign, and Glucksman refused.

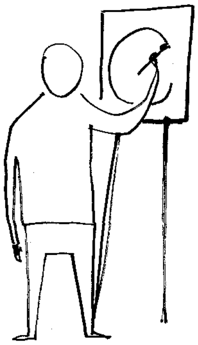
Schwarzman urged Peterson to fight, insisting that they could rally enough support to block Glucksman. But Peterson saw no point in waging a civil war that might destroy the firm, and said that it was time to start something new. As part of his severance package, he insisted on generous stock options, which would be valuable if the firm was ever sold.

Peterson's departure did not forestall civil war at Lehman Brothers, and within months the firm was losing money. Schwarzman, accurately gauging the ambitions of Peter Cohen, the chairman of American Express, to expand into the potentially lucrative field of investment banking, approached Cohen (a neighbor in East Hampton) and delivered a persuasive assessment of the benefits to American Express of buying Lehman. In 1984, just nine months after Peterson's departure, Lehman was sold for $360 million. To many, it was Schwarzman's most brilliant deal yet: he had enriched himself and his mentor while turning the tables on Glucksman and freeing himself to join Peterson in launching a new partnership.

Schwarzman initially refused to accompany Peterson in that new venture, because Peterson already had a partner, the investor Eli Jacobs, but Peterson and Jacobs soon quarrelled. This falling out cleared the way for Schwarzman to join Peterson, in 1985. Peterson and Schwarzman created a founders' agreement that vested power in their hands alone, guaranteeing that one faction of partners couldn't start a war over control of the firm. Peterson and Schwarzman had equal equity shares. Initially, they were going to call the firm Peterson & Schwarzman, with Schwarzman conceding top billing to Peterson, but Peterson argued that they needed something more institutional, or future partners would want their names added, leading to constant changes and an unwieldy name. It was Schwarzman's idea to call it Black—*schwarz*, in German—stone, *petros*, in Greek. "I thought that was brilliant," Peterson says.

"My job was to bring in business," Peterson explains. He launched a direct-mail campaign, targeting a hundred chief executives, in which he declared that Blackstone would not back hostile deals and would have no conflicts of interest with investment-banking clients, since Blackstone had no investment-banking clients. According to Peterson, the effort resulted in retainer agreements with E. F. Hutton, Firestone, Union Carbide, Bristol-Myers, and Sony, whose chairman, Akio Morita, knew Peterson from his White House years. Peterson, in turn, joined the Sony board, solidifying his links with Japan.

Schwarzman and Peterson had bigger ambitions than a boutique firm: they wanted an institution with an array of businesses that could deliver a "comparative advantage," the mantra of competition taught at Peterson's alma mater, the University of Chicago. Schwarzman was also eager to expand into something less subject to volatile market cycles than M. & A. An obvious target was private equity, the new, sanitized name for the leveraged buyouts that had resulted in the scandals of the nineteen-eighties. Combining a merger-advisory business with a buyout fund was bold; leveraged-buyout funds were considered hostile to existing managements, and that was antithetical to Peterson's insistence that Blackstone's activities be strictly friendly to its corporate clients. But he and Schwarzman were convinced that a private-equity fund could be useful to established managements, too.



Shortly after they formed the company, a cautionary scandal involving Dennis Levine, who had been a Schwarzman protégé in Lehman's M. & A. department, became public. Levine was an aggressive banker who had occupied the office next to Schwarzman's, and who showed an uncanny ability to foresee hostile bids, which, in turn, often enabled Lehman to approach the target company to defend it. In 1986, Levine, who had left Lehman and was at Drexel Burnham Lambert, was arrested and charged with insider trading. This launched the biggest insider-trading scandal in Wall Street history. Levine agreed to coöperate with investigators, and eventually pleaded guilty to four felony counts. Among those implicated in the ensuing investigation were the arbitrager Ivan Boesky and the junk-bond financier Michael Milken. In short order came the collapse of Drexel Burnham, Milken's firm and the principal force behind the takeover boom; the collapse of the junk-bond market; the savings-and-loan debacle, which was in part a consequence of junk bonds; and the 1990-91 recession.

According to Schwarzman, much of Levine's insider trading had involved confidential information that he gleaned from his work at Lehman, including deals that Schwarzman had worked on. "Seldom have I felt so violated or betrayed," Schwarzman said. "I personally talk to every class of first-year associates and analysts and tell them the story of Dennis Levine. I lecture them on what inside information is and how important it is to keep it confidential. Integrity is a core value. Dennis Levine helped drive that home for me."

"Blackstone puts a huge emphasis on integrity," Peterson told me. "We have a code of conduct, and every employee signs it every year. You have an affirmative responsibility to speak out about anything questionable, or unethical, you know about. If you don't, you're dismissed. In twenty-three years, we haven't had one scandal."

Despite the 1987 crash, the ensuing collapse of the junk-bond market, and the recession, the nineteen-nineties were the beginning of a golden age for private equity. As with leveraged buyouts, the power of private equity, and the wellspring of its remarkable profits, is leverage—the use of borrowed money. The private-equity fund raises capital from rich investors, often pension funds or large institutions. (The fund is "private" in that only invited investors are allowed to participate.) It uses the capital to buy an asset, typically a publicly traded company or a unit of a publicly traded company; restructures it financially to add layers of debt; manages it aggressively to cut costs and boost cash flow; then, after five to seven years, pays off the debt and resells the company or relaunches it on the public markets at an enormous profit. The power of leverage is vast: if you invest ten dollars in an asset and sell it a year later for twelve, you have earned twenty per cent. If you invest one dollar, borrow nine, pay a dollar in interest on the debt (an eleven-per-cent rate), and sell the asset for the same twelve dollars, your return is one hundred per cent.

Much as private-equity firms like to extoll the brilliance of their M.B.A.-holding partners and associates, this isn't a difficult concept, which raises the question of why public companies don't embrace the same high-leverage, high-profit model. The reason is that private-equity funds exist to generate capital gains, which are taxed at fifteen per cent; public companies focus on earnings, which are taxed at a much higher rate. Public companies are typically valued at a multiple of earnings, and the interest payments associated with high leverage may all but eliminate earnings. Private companies don't report earnings. Freed from any preoccupation with quarterly earnings reports, private-equity firms like to praise their long-term perspective, but "long term" means between five and seven years, at which point they sell the asset to realize a capital gain and move on to new conquests. Most public companies are managed so as to exist in perpetuity. Even so, in recent years public companies have added huge amounts of leverage to their balance sheets, often by buying back their shares or taking on debt for acquisitions.

In addition to the turbocharging effects of leverage, private-equity operations like Blackstone benefit from an exceedingly generous compensation structure. The private-equity manager takes a management fee—two per cent is common—of the capital raised from the firm's investors and twenty per cent of all gains (a stake known as "carried interest"), under the formula known on Wall Street as "two and twenty." What's left over is returned to the investors. The fees have no relation to the size or sophistication of the deal or the hours worked. Private-equity bankers reap the same twenty-per-cent carried interest on a multibillion-dollar deal as on one involving several million. A few firms have pushed higher, to twenty-five- and even to thirty-per-cent carried interest, but few have been willing to undercut the standard. Investors have tolerated the exorbitant fees, as long as they have been able to get results that surpass what they can earn in conventional stock and bond funds.

Several early Blackstone deals illustrate the firm's strategy of combining high-leverage buyouts with M.&A. advisory work for established clients. In 1987, USX (the former U.S. Steel) was under pressure to raise its stock price in order to fend off the corporate raider Carl Icahn. To raise cash for a stock buyback, USX decided to sell its transport subsidiaries, which hauled iron ore and other raw materials into USX's factories and finished steel out of them. It was an unglamorous, low-growth business, but it had a captive customer in USX and predictable cash flow to service debt. Peterson argued that Blackstone was friendly, whereas other bidders might prove little better than a raider, like Icahn. His argument prevailed, and USX sold the subsidiaries, for $640 million, to a company owned fifty-one per cent by Blackstone and forty-nine per cent by USX and the company's managers. Blackstone invested just $13 million, with the rest in debt financing. USX used the cash to buy back shares, and Icahn eventually went away. According to Blackstone, the project ultimately generated a return of more than two thousand per cent.

Leverage greatly magnifies gains, but it exacerbates losses in equal measure. Recessions are especially treacherous. An early Blackstone employee, recalling 1990 and '91, says, "These were tough years. Everyone was trying to prove themselves. The culture hadn't jelled." Though Schwarzman could be affable and charming—he called every partner on his or her birthday and sang "Happy Birthday"—he was impatient with failure and felt under intense pressure to prove himself. He sharply criticized employees like Steven Winograd and Brian McVeigh in front of others, forcing them out of the firm in the wake of bad deals. He clashed with Larry Fink, who departed with his money-management unit, BlackRock, which now manages more than a trillion dollars in assets. Roger Altman left to become Deputy Treasury Secretary in the Clinton Administration, and eventually started his own private-equity firm, Evercore.

Turnover among partners was relatively high. The stress and the long hours damaged Schwarzman's marriage; he and Ellen divorced in 1990, though he remained close to his children.

In 1993, Schwarzman hired another refugee from Lehman Brothers, J. Tomilson Hill, the former co-chief executive, to run Blackstone's fledgling offerings in the world of hedge funds, the third major prong in Blackstone's expansion strategy. Hedge funds have been the fastest-growing financial vehicles of the past five years—there are some eight thousand—and are fuelled by the same quest for higher returns and low volatility that has driven the private-equity boom. Hedge

THE MAGIC KINGDOM

> And as in the daily casualties of life every man is, as it were, threatened with numberless deaths, so long as it remains uncertain which of them is his fate, I would ask whether it is not better to suffer one and die, than to live in fear of all?
>
> —*St. Augustine, "City of God."*

This morning, I found on a slip of paper tucked into a book
a list of questions I'd written down years ago to ask the doctor.
What if it has spread? Is it possible I'm crazy? I've just returned
from Florida, from visiting my mother's last sister, who is eighty
& doing fine. At the airport, my flight grounded by a storm,
I bought a magazine, which fell open to a photograph
of three roseate spoonbills tossing down their elegant shadows
on a chartreuse field of fertilizer-production waste.
Two little girls emptied their Ziplocs of Pepperidge Farm Goldfish
onto the carpet & picked them up, one by one, with great delicacy,
before popping them into their mouths. Their mother, outside
smoking, kept an eye on them through the glass. After my cousin died,
my father died & then my brother. Next, my father's older brother
& his wife. And, finally, after my mother died, I expected
to die myself. And because this happened very quickly
& because these were, really, almost all the people I knew,
I spent each day smashing dishes with one of my uncle's hammers
& gluing them back together in new ways. It was strange work
& dangerous, even though I tried to protect myself—
wearing a quilted bathrobe & goggles & leather work gloves
& opening all the windows, even in snow, against the vapors

of the industrial adhesives. Most days now I get up late
& brew coffee & the smell rises from the old enamel pot
I've had to balance under the dark drip ever since the carafe
that came with the machine shattered in the dishwasher last month.

One morning I found a lump in my breast & my vision narrowed
to a small dot & I began to sweat. My legs & arms felt weak,
& my heart thrashed behind its bars. We were not written
to be safe. In the old tales, the woodcutter's daughter's path
takes her, each time, through the dark forest. There are new words
for all of this: a shot of panic becomes the rustle of glucocorticoid
signalling the sympathetic nervous system into a response
regulated by the sensitivity of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis.
And, as I go along, these freshly minted charms clatter together
in the tender doeskin of the throat as though the larynx
were nothing if not a sack of amulets tied with a cord & worn
around the neck. But I tell you I sat on the bathroom floor for hours,
trembling. And I can tell you this because the lump was just a lump
& some days now I don't even dread the end although I know
it will arrive. The garage is filled with buckets of broken china.
The girls chased each other & waved their arms, casting spells,
the trim of their matching gingham dresses the electric pink
of the birds' wings. They turned each other into princesses
& super-girls & then they pretended to change back.
Oh, no. You forgot to say forever—they took turns repeating
with dramatic dismay, melting into puddles of themselves,
their sandals & sunburned knees vanishing beneath their hems.

—*Kathleen Graber*

funds got their name from investment strategies that sell stocks short, or "hedge" against a declining market, thereby generating high returns in both bull and bear markets, but they embrace many investment strategies. The only thing they have in common with private-equity partnerships is the two-and-twenty (or higher) fee structure. Only recently has Blackstone launched its own hedge funds; its focus had been on what is known as a "fund of funds" approach, meaning that it steered clients' money into suitable hedge funds. In return, Blackstone takes a fee of one per cent of the assets. The combination of private-equity, real-estate, and hedge funds has given Blackstone a presence in all three of the major alternative-asset classes.

In 1993, Schwarzman was introduced to Christine Hearst, a glamorous forty-year-old who had recently been divorced from Austin Hearst, an heir to the Hearst fortune. Christine, an intellectual-property lawyer, grew up on Long Island, the daughter of a New York City fireman. The two were married in 1995, at Schwarzman's Manhattan apartment, and the reception was held at the Frick Collection.

The severe decline in stock prices between March, 2000, and October, 2002, during which the S.&P. 500 dropped forty-nine per cent and the technology-heavy Nasdaq composite an astounding seventy-eight per cent, was devastating for the large financial companies, pension funds, and nonprofit institutions that depended on equity gains to finance their operations and to fund their obligations to retirees. The traditional investment mix of equities and bonds had served them well during the nineteen-nineties; now they found their asset values and endowments shrinking and, with them, the spending power that balanced operating budgets. Suddenly, the most desirable investments among institutions were those which, like hedge funds, private-equity, natural resources, and emerging-market funds, don't necessarily track the stock market—so-called non-correlated assets.

Blackstone, too, struggled during the recession of 2001 and the collapse of the technology bubble, but not to the same extent as venture-capital firms and technology investors. As new money fled the stock market and poured into the firm, Schwarzman's management style evolved, but only incrementally. Partners recall that, for all the firm's success, Schwarzman acted as though they were only a deal away from failure. One person recalls a voice mail containing harsh criticism of a troubled deal that followed moments after the "Happy Birthday" call. A Blackstone investor recalls a golf outing with Blackstone partners where the game ended abruptly after the fifteenth hole, because Schwarzman expected his partners to be on time for the cocktail party. "It was ridiculous," this investor says. "When he says jump, they jump. Still, I have to say they're very disciplined in their business."

Early on, Peterson agreed that the firm should have only one chief executive, and readily deferred to Schwarzman, a stickler for detail who chose the firm's wallpaper and furnishings and interviewed every prospective employee. But, as the firm grew, Schwarzman came under pressure to delegate some management responsibilities and to carve out bigger equity stakes for both existing partners and new executives. Among those arguing for a change in course was Peterson, whose partnership with Schwarzman, perhaps inevitably, was increasingly strained. Although Schwarzman and Peterson had initially had equal equity stakes in the firm, over the years, as equity was awarded to other partners, those grants had come disproportionally from Peterson's holdings. Peterson agreed that Schwarzman's role merited a larger stake; indeed, he'd told Schwarzman that he wanted to spend less time at the firm and, in return, was willing to relinquish some of his equity. Still, the negotiations were painful. At one point, Peterson said that he would not give up any more, and he insisted on an agreement in writing. By the eve of the public offering, Schwarzman owned almost thirty per cent of the firm; Peterson's interest had shrunk to eleven per cent.

Schwarzman and Peterson had dif-

"Do I need to remind you that I have a huge Internet following?"

• •

ferent approaches to risk. Peterson was inherently more cautious, and Schwarzman found that every time Blackstone ventured into a new line of business he had to persuade Peterson to go along.

One banker who knows both men well explains, "At this point, there's tremendous animosity between Steve and Pete. Steve gets the credit, but it was Pete's Rolodex that built that firm. Pete gave and gave equity to accommodate more people, but Steve never gave. Pete may not be perfect. He encumbered the process. Steve did deserve the greater participation. But Steve never understood the importance of Pete's broad-gauge nature." A friend of Schwarzman's put it this way: "The son eclipsed the father. Neither feels he's gotten sufficient respect from the other."

These tensions need to be kept in perspective: the Schwarzman-Peterson partnership, which has survived twenty-three years, is one of the most successful and enduring in Wall Street history. While conceding that there were some issues over equity shares, Schwarzman told me, "I have enormous respect for Pete, and we have a seamless relationship. Ours is the longest adult relationship in my life. We've never disagreed on any major issue. We do come at life from different points of view. He's eighty-one—a different generation. He's a good strategist and planner, a great thinker. We end up reaching the same conclusions."

Schwarzman recognized that if he was to remain immersed in deals and larger strategic initiatives Blackstone needed a manager. In early 2002, he approached Hamilton (Tony) E. James, the tall, cerebral, patrician head of the investment-banking arm of Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette, which had recently been acquired by Credit Suisse First Boston. Already wealthy from the Credit Suisse First Boston deal, James, who had run his own operations for fifteen years, was planning to pursue personal interests, after helping with the merger. But Schwarzman courted him over a series of dinners at his apartment, and every meeting, James told me, "was more intriguing." Schwarzman argued that Blackstone was outgrowing its entrepreneurial phase and needed more professional management. James had been deeply involved in all of Blackstone's lines of business while he was at Donaldson. "People say Steve is a tough boss," James said. "I don't mind this; I'm happy to be accountable. Just give me the scope to run the business. He convinced me that I'd be empowered. If others didn't like it, he'd support me one hundred per cent."

James arrived in the summer of 2002, the stock market's nadir. He streamlined operations, brought in new partners, imposed new screening standards for potential deals, and expanded committee oversight, so that deals weren't based on one person's judgment. He completed an internal evaluation called "Respect at Work," aimed at boosting morale and coöperation. He worked to soften Blackstone's aggressive image with clients and other dealmakers. "I didn't want to be the most difficult partner—I wanted to get the first call," he says. In contrast to Schwarzman, James worked toward consensus. "You can't dictate," he says. "I was more a guide than a leader." To the surprise of many, Schwarzman delegated broad authority to James to run the firm.

Peterson gives James much of the credit for the firm's recent success. "At my age, I can afford to be objective," he told me. "Steve deserves credit. He's aggressive, focussed, and growth-oriented. But Tony James is a remarkable manager. People love working for him. If you ask the top people why they're here, they'll tell you it's because of Tony James."

Blackstone's alternative-asset businesses were not alone in benefitting from the extremely low interest rates and lax lending standards of the post-September 11th and post-Internet-bubble economy. Residential-real-estate values, which also benefit from high leverage, surged as well, becoming what is now widely conceded to be a bubble that rivalled or surpassed the Internet frenzy in magnitude. Not only were there billions of dollars in home refinancings as Americans drew cash from the rising value of their real estate; subprime lending—to borrowers who had bad credit records or who didn't document their incomes, assets, or jobs—had soared in recent years. This huge expansion in risky loans was made possible by Wall Street banks such as Citigroup and Merrill Lynch, which bundled the loans together and parcelled out the resulting "collateralized debt obligations"—C.D.O.s—to investors eager for higher returns in a low-interest-rate environment. The theory was that any one of these loans was at high risk of default, but a large and diversified portfolio in which only a small percentage of loans defaulted was so safe that it merited an AAA rating from the credit agencies.

Though these loans were hugely profitable for the banks that packaged and marketed them, Blackstone wasn't tempted. Jonathan Gray, the co-head of Blackstone's real-estate group, explains that subprime mortgages and related securities weren't Blackstone's area of expertise. "We invest in what we know and understand," he said, noting that the firm has less than one per cent in residential real estate.

Schwarzman tries to avoid business meetings when he's in the Hamptons, but in June, 2006, Michael Klein, the chairman and co-chief executive of markets and banking at Citigroup, came over for lunch. Schwarzman and Klein tried to meet at least once a year outside the office to brainstorm, but this year's discussion had taken on added urgency as stock markets soared and private equity reaped ever larger gains. Klein unveiled a detailed plan for taking the Blackstone Group public, in an initial public offering that, he argued, would value the company at an astounding $30 billion. This wasn't the first time someone had broached the idea of going public—Goldman Sachs had been raising the issue for some time, especially after its own successful offering, in 1999. Schwarzman, who had taken so many companies public, had often pondered the possibility. Still, at that point no private-equity or other alternative-asset managers had taken their firms public. It was one thing for full-service investment banks like Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley to be publicly owned; they were closer to commercial banks than to private partnerships, and much of their income was fee-driven. But private-equity firms like Blackstone had long argued that their financial interests and incentives were identical to those of their investors: Blackstone partners, by investing in the same partnerships and having a carried interest, prospered when their clients did. If Blackstone was a public company, it would need to consider its shareholders' interests along with those of its investors.

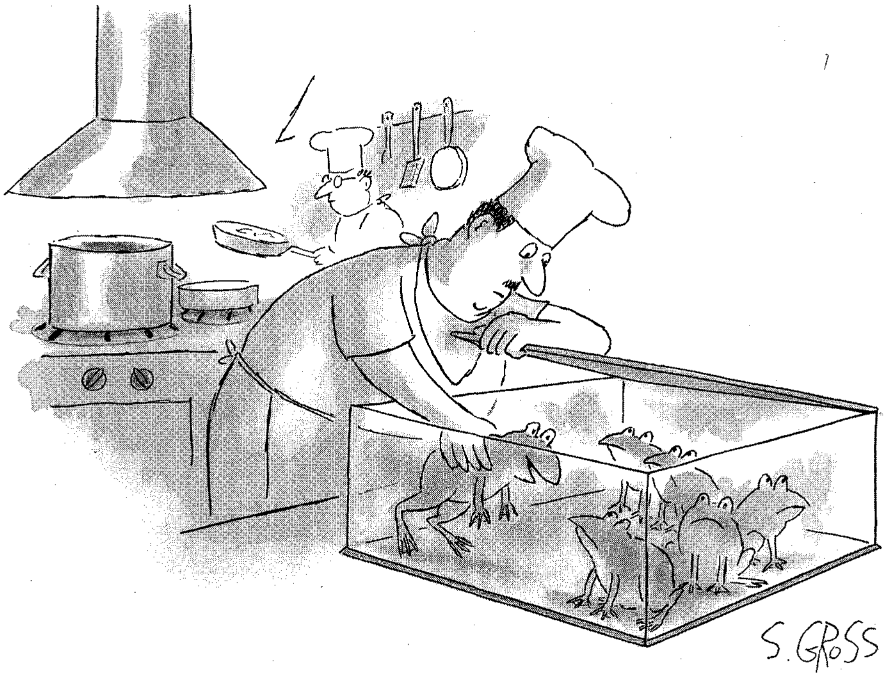
A public offering would also expose aspects of Blackstone's business that even close observers could only guess at, such as its ownership structure, its partners' equity shares, its compensation, and, most important, the exorbitant profits that Blackstone was earning, and, by extrapolation, the exorbitant profits of other private-equity and alternative-asset-management firms. At a time of growing discrepancies in income between the poor and the rich, how would the public react to these revelations? It also seemed peculiar that a private-equity firm, which championed the virtues of private ownership, would elect to go public.

Still, Michael Klein convinced Schwarzman that Blackstone could retain many of the benefits of private ownership, and that it would be able to align the interests of management and investors. Investors would continue to invest, Schwarzman felt, as long as Blackstone delivered superior results. Public ownership would generate capital for investment and expansion and a currency—common stock—that could be used for acquisitions. "Michael wasn't the first to propose this, but he was the first who really understood the earnings power and the growth potential," Schwarzman says. "I told him the only problem was that his valuation was too low."

Peterson told me that he also discussed these issues at length with Schwarzman, including the fact that Schwarzman needed to be discreet about his own wealth. "I could have blocked this, but I didn't," he said. "Still, I told him, you're going to be the focus of intense scrutiny. You'll be the first. You'd better be prepared."

As secret preparations went forward, at one point involving as many as a hundred and fifty auditors poring over Blackstone's records, the buyout boom moved into high gear, with a record sixteen hundred announced deals in the first half of 2007 alone. Stock markets rose as many stocks were valued to include the premiums that a private-equity firm could be expected to pay. Banks competed aggressively to lend, and the spread between junk bonds and U.S. Treasuries—historically, a measure of investors' tolerance for risk—reached an all-time low. In this potentially lucrative buyout environment, Blackstone began to hold back. "We were cautious in the so-called golden age," Schwarzman says. "We were the least aggressive of all the big firms in the first half of 2007. We were very concerned about the high prices of deals and the vast amount of liquidity fuelling the boom—we had articulated this at an investor conference in May, 2006. Things always come to an end, and when they do they end badly. We only did two large deals—Hilton Hotels and Equity Office Properties."

Despite Peterson's advice to avoid personal publicity, Schwarzman began planning the party for his sixtieth birthday, which fell on February 14, 2007. Weeks



"We will always have Paris."

before the event, the *Times* ran an article, by Landon Thomas, previewing the plans and speculating about the guest list: "MORE RUMORS ABOUT HIS PARTY THAN HIS DEALS." The article also mentioned Schwarzman's tradition of extravagant Christmas parties, including the most recent, which had had a James Bond theme, and featured models circulating dressed as "Bond girls," with Schwarzman in a tuxedo. "Steve does not like little things, whether it's deals, Christmas parties, or his own homes," the investor Roland Betts, who is a member of the Yale Corporation, told the *Times*.

Schwarzman and his press spokesman tried to discourage the story, without success, and it came out just as the huge Equity Office Properties deal reached its climax. In the event, the scale of the party disappointed no one. Part of the cavernous Park Avenue armory was transformed into a large-scale replica of the Schwarzmans' Manhattan apartment by Philip Baloun, the party planner who designed the Prince Charles gala at Lincoln Center. Replicas of Schwarzman's art collection were mounted on the walls, including, at the entrance, a full-length portrait of him by Andrew Festing, the president of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters. Dinner was served in a faux night-club setting, with orchids and palm trees. Guests dined on lobster, filet mignon, and baked Alaska, and were offered an array of expensive wines. (Schwarzman himself doesn't drink.)

The comedian Martin Short was the m.c.; he poked fun at his short, rich host. The composer-pianist Marvin Hamlisch played a number from "A Chorus Line." Patti LaBelle sang a song written for Schwarzman, and Rod Stewart sang a medley of his hits, for a reported fee of a million dollars.

Fortune put Schwarzman on the cover of its March 5th issue, proclaiming him "Wall Street's Man of the Moment: with a history-making deal and headline-making birthday party, Steve Schwarzman has become the symbol of a new era in finance. And that's always a risky proposition."

This kind of attention was exactly what Peterson had feared. "I'm a son of Greek immigrants," Peterson told me. "For years, I'd shop at sales to save twenty-five per cent and take the shuttle to Washington to save money. I waited twenty-seven years to buy the apartment I wanted. Steve made fun of me, said it was irrational. Maybe he's right. Steve is a different generation. They were brought up differently. They like to consume. They're boomers. They want it all and they want it now. To hell with the future!"

On March 22nd, Blackstone filed a preliminary prospectus for an initial public offering, revealing that it had more than $78 billion in assets under management and listing its high returns. Two months later, an updated filing disclosed the existence of an investment by a sovereign wealth fund, the State Investment Company of China; it agreed to pay $3 billion for a non-voting stake of just under ten per cent. The Chinese investment—the first equity stake ever taken by the fund—immediately valued Blackstone at more than $32 billion.

On June 12th, Blackstone added the details that everyone on Wall Street had been waiting for: how much Schwarzman would make in the deal and how much of the firm he and Peterson owned. The prospectus disclosed that Schwarzman would take out $677.2 million from the offering and would retain a twenty-four-per-cent ownership stake, valued at nearly $8 billion, at the expected thirty-dollar-a-share offering price. Peterson would withdraw $1.9 billion, to be placed in a charitable trust, and would retain just a four-per-cent stake, valued at $1.3 billion. Tony James would withdraw $188.5 million and retain a 4.9-per-cent stake, valued at more than $1.6 billion.

"You have no idea what an impression this made on Wall Street," a friend of Schwarzman's who works at another bank says. "You have all these guys who have spent their entire lives working just as hard to make twenty million. Sure, that's a lot of money, but then Schwarzman turns around and, seemingly overnight, has eight billion."

Two days later, the *Wall Street Journal* ran a front-page story, by Monica Langley and Henny Sender, that recapped the now notorious birthday party, and quoted Schwarzman's Palm Beach chef, who said that Schwarzman dined on four-hundred-dollar stone crabs and complained about an employee's shoes because he found the squeak of their rubber soles distracting. The article quoted Schwarzman saying that his business philosophy is "I want war—not a series of skirmishes" and "I always think of what will kill off the other bidder."

Schwarzman was wounded by the *Journal* article, which, he noted defensively, didn't mention that he had sent the chef's daughter to summer schools at Harvard and Yale and kept the chef on his payroll while he was undergoing treatments for cancer.

The combination of self-indulgence, seeming disregard for those less privileged, and militant hostility toward rivals inflamed many on Wall Street who were already envious of Schwarzman's record and the additional fortune that he was about to gain.

The day after the *Journal* story appeared, Senators Max Baucus and Chuck Grassley proposed legislation that would subject private-equity partnerships like Blackstone, whose earnings had been taxed at the lower rate of "passive income," to ordinary corporate income taxes. In the House, Charles Rangel proposed that carried interest be taxed at the ordinary income rate rather than at the lower capital-gains rate. The measure would effectively increase Blackstone's tax rate from fifteen per cent to thirty-five per cent, seriously eroding its profitability, and, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation, would generate an extra twenty-six billion dollars over the next ten years.

On June 22nd, the opening day of trading, Blackstone shares reached a high of thirty-eight dollars. On a day that should have been the pinnacle of Schwarzman's career, with an achievement likely to earn him a place among such figures of finance as J. P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie, Schwarzman stayed away from the Stock Exchange and didn't ring the traditional closing bell, apprehensive about further unflattering publicity. He had no plans for that night. His wife was on a long-scheduled African safari. He worked until after 8 P.M., then returned to his apartment and had dinner in the library, in front of the TV. He wanted to escape, perhaps with an episode of

"CSI." He clicked on the remote, and stumbled onto a live panel discussion on CNBC about him and the Blackstone offering.

"I stared at this in complete amazement," Schwarzman said. "All I wanted was a normal private moment in front of the TV. I thought it was all over." He sat for about ten minutes before turning the TV off, feeling odd and alone.

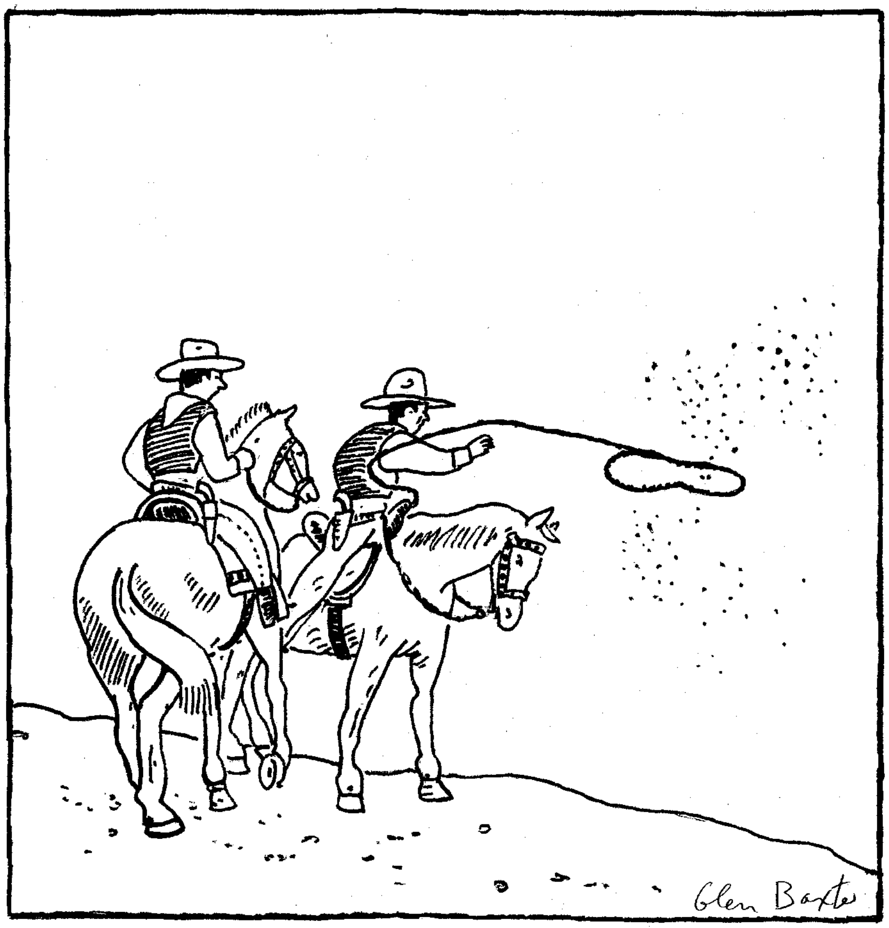
Within weeks of Blackstone's offering, Wall Street was shaken by rising defaults in subprime mortgages, which exposed the inherent risk in all those supposedly safe, diversified C.D.O.s. Losses appeared throughout the global financial system, surfacing in everything from foreign banks to American pension funds, and even a few very safe money-market funds.

Although Blackstone avoided the mortgage and credit debacles that are expected to lead to more than two hundred and sixty billion dollars in losses, the resulting credit freeze caused asset values to plunge, credit to disappear, and leverage to decline, all of which affected Blackstone's core businesses. Its earnings for its first two quarters as a public company disappointed investors, and its stock went down. Early last month, Blackstone couldn't raise the financing for the buyout of the mortgage unit of PHH Corporation, which it had agreed to buy in 2007, and the deal collapsed. At the end of the month, Blackstone's proposed buyout of Alliance Data Systems, for $6.8 billion, also collapsed, and A.D.S. is suing Blackstone to force it to complete the deal. The "bad ending" that Schwarzman predicted in 2006 seemed to be at hand.

"I've lived through periods of illiquidity before," he said. "Asset prices come down. The economy slows or even goes into recession. Then the cycle re-starts. We buy at lower prices with less leverage. There are great opportunities for high returns—much better than the so-called golden age we've just come through. From our perspective, we see greater opportunities going ahead."

When I was talking with Schwarzman in his office, I asked him how it felt to be the focus of so much negative attention.

He paused, and his look hardened.



MY FIRST JOB WAS TO CLEAR THE RANGE OF MOSQUITOES.

• •

"How does it feel? Unattractive. No thinking person wants to be reduced to a caricature." He continued, "Why did this happen? We went public in June, 2007, at the top of a giant bull market, with a society undergoing rapid change. Globalization. Job dislocation. Middle-class anxiety. Private equity is seen as a symbol of the people who are prospering from a world in flux. That's a lightning-rod situation."

He said that "plenty of people" had tried to advise him on how extremely rich people are expected to behave—the charitable activities, the good works, the donations. "But you know what?" he said. "I don't feel like a wealthy person. Other people think of me as a wealthy person, but I don't. I feel the same as when I was a fifth-year associate trying to make partner at Lehman Brothers. I haven't changed. I still think of Blackstone as a small firm. We have to prove ourselves in every deal. Every piece of paper is important. I'm always still trying."

Schwarzman told me that in 1993, at forty-six, he was found to have a rare blood-protein deficiency that put him at risk of a blood clot or embolism, a condition that had killed his grandfather at the same age. He is tested every few weeks and takes a pill each day, which he says should help guarantee him a normal life span. Still, "it's a reminder that life is fleeting," he said. "Every day should be a good day. People fool themselves that they'll be here forever. I get a daily wake-up call that that's not true. We have limited time, and we have to maximize it. Live life intensely—I've always believed in that. I'm happy to be here. I was happy to make it to sixty. That's the simple reason for the birthday party." ♦

SINCE 1916
Nathan's
FAMOUS
THIS IS THE ORIGINAL
OPEN ALL YEAR
Nathan's
FAMOUS
SEA FO
OCEAN VIEW
COFFEE * BEVERAGES * CIGARS * CIGARETTES
CONVENIENCE
BATTERIES * SUN TAN LOTION * ICE CREAM * ITALIAN ICES

SINCE 1916
Nathan's
FAMOUS
WORLD FAMOUS
FRANKFURTERS SINCE 1916
CLAM BAR
DELICATESSEN
Buffet Catering
Nathan's
FAMOUS
TAKE HOME FOOD

Like most oceanfront real estate, Coney Island has forever attracted self-anointed improvers with all manner of motives. It has withstood high-minded attempts at preservation and low-minded development big-footing by the likes of Robert Moses, Fred Trump, and Rudy Giuliani. A succession of promoters have blended right in with the three-card-monte sharps, hawking casinos, luxury hotels and condos, office buildings, mall-enclosed indoor amusement parks, the inevitable inflatable giant water slide, and whatever "revitalization" fantasies Michael Bloomberg entertained while trying to seduce the International Olympic Committee. Unlike so much of Brooklyn, it has proved immune to Manhattanization and probably will for many years to come—for as long, at least, as the public-housing architecture with which the Master Builder insulted the community casts its insolent silhouette.

Kitsch nixes nostalgia. A pleasure strand designated for adolescent amusement, did it experience an adolescence of its own? Perhaps a century and a half ago, when it was still a hunting ground for the ubiquitous rabbits that gave it its Dutch name, Konijn Eiland.

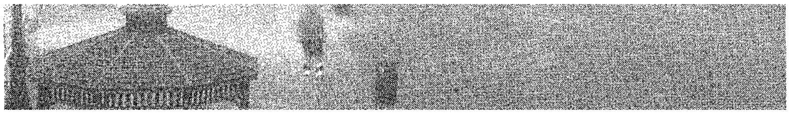
As eponym, it can go either way: delectable (if you like hot dogs and aren't planning to eat about sixty in twelve minutes) or regrettable ("Coney Island whitefish"—a used condom, in outer-borough-ese). In the mid-twentieth century, its emblematic characters, the type Joseph Mitchell referred to as "out-and-out freak-show freaks," made it a magnet for photographers—Weegee, most memorably. Whether in dystopian panoramas or in Robert Polidori's dispassionate aerial views, it paradoxically reveals more in autumnal shadow and fog than in summer sunlight.

For subway riders, it's the end of the line. An hour from midtown, you can be chin-deep in the what-have-we-here surf or aiming a .68-calibre rifle at an arcade employee whose occupation is getting shot at with paintballs. If you're in the mood for a trifecta, you can still buy lunch at Nathan's and lose it, in installments, aboard the Wonder Wheel and the Cyclone. Coney's singular poem is the boardwalk, two and a half elegiac herringboned miles. An end-of-a-movie long shot or, for that matter, a beginning. What's it to you?

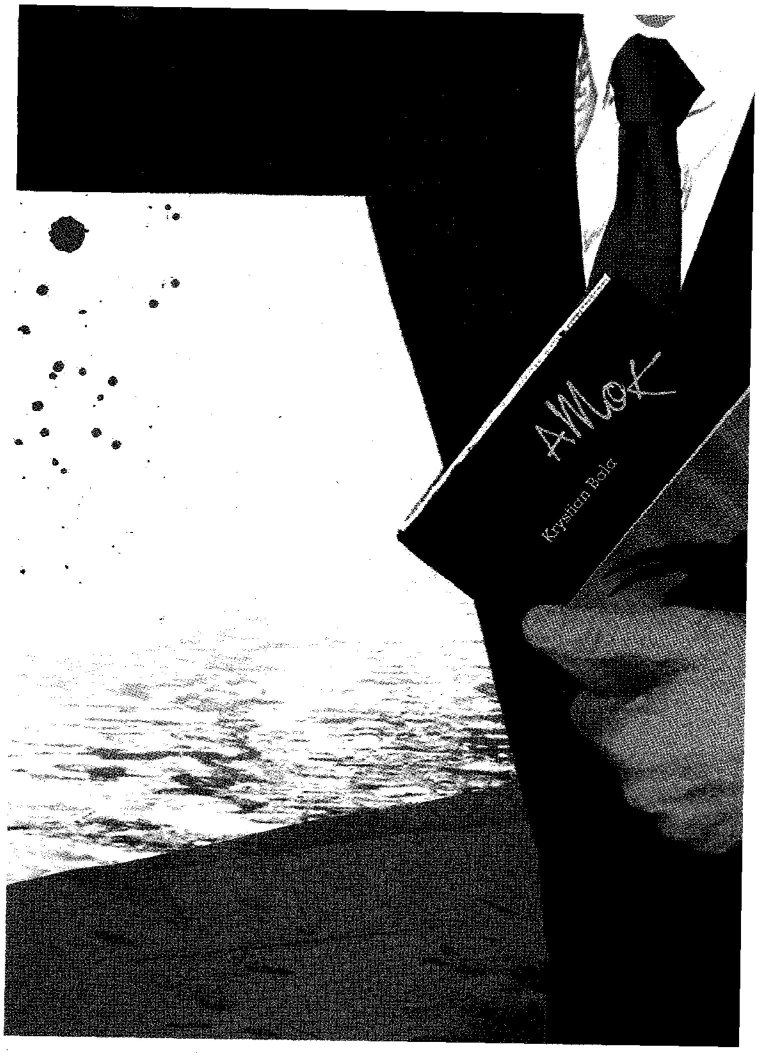
—Mark Singer

1050 AM
ESPN
The Sports Talk of New York
WONDER WHEEL
THRILLS
WONDER

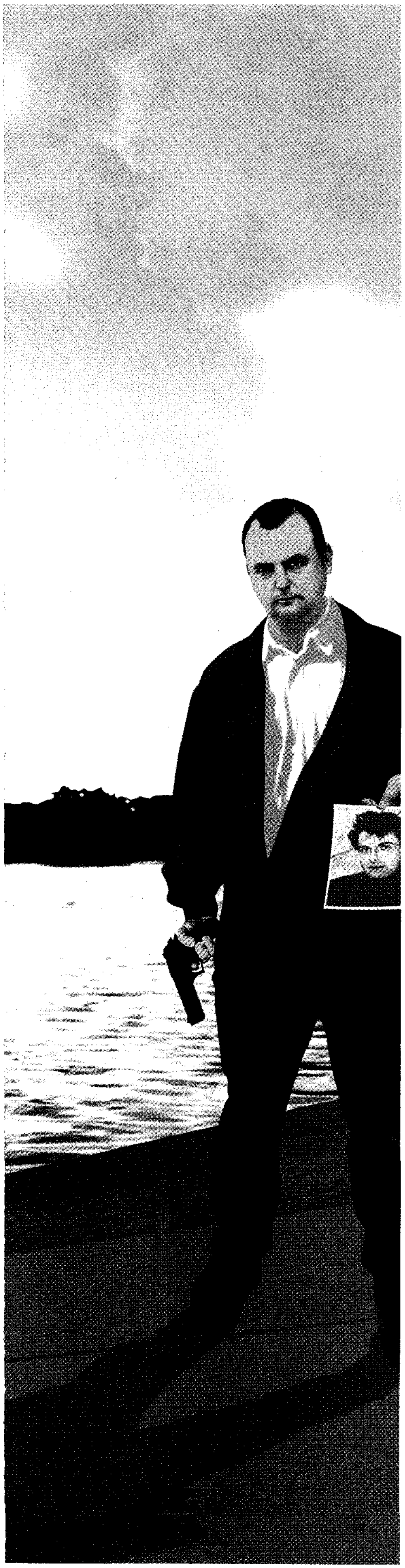
Deno's
SNACK
BAR
FAMIGLIA
ASTROLAND



Deno's
SNACK BAR
FAMIGLIA


Amok
Krystian Bala

JOHN RITTER



LETTER FROM POLAND

TRUE CRIME

A postmodern murder mystery.

BY DAVID GRANN

In the southwest corner of Poland, far from any town or city, the Oder River curls sharply, creating a tiny inlet. The banks are matted with wild grass and shrouded by towering pine and oak trees. The only people who regularly trek to the area are fishermen—the inlet teems with perch and pike and sun bass. On a cold December day in 2000, three friends were casting there when one of them noticed something floating by the shore. At first, he thought it was a log, but as he drew closer he saw what looked like hair. The fisherman shouted to one of his friends, who poked the object with his rod. It was a dead body.

The fishermen called the police, who carefully removed the corpse of a man from the water. A noose was around his neck, and his hands were bound behind his back. Part of the rope, which appeared to have been cut with a knife, had once connected his hands to his neck, binding the man in a backward cradle, an excruciating position—the slightest wiggle would have caused the noose to tighten further. There was no doubt that the man had been murdered. His body was clothed in only a sweatshirt and underwear, and it bore marks of torture. A pathologist determined that the victim had virtually no food in his intestines, which indicated that he had been starved for several days before he was killed. Initially, the police thought that he had been strangled and then dumped in the river, but an examination of fluids in his lungs revealed signs of drowning, which meant that he was probably still alive when he was dropped into the water.

The victim—tall, with long dark hair and blue eyes—seemed to match the description of a thirty-five-year-old businessman named Dariusz Janiszewski, who had lived in the city of Wroclaw, sixty miles away, and who had been reported missing by his wife nearly four weeks earlier; he had last been seen on November 13th, leaving the small advertising firm that he owned, in downtown Wroclaw. When the police summoned Janiszewski's wife to see if she could identify the body, she was too distraught to look, and so Janiszewski's mother did instead. She immediately recognized her son's flowing hair and the birthmark on his chest.

The police launched a major investigation. Scuba divers plunged into the frigid river, looking for evidence. Forensic specialists combed the forest. Dozens of associates were questioned, and Janiszewski's business records were examined. Nothing of note was found. Although Janiszewski and his wife, who had wed eight years earlier, had a brief period of trouble in their marriage, they had since reconciled and were about to adopt a child. He had no apparent debts or enemies, and no criminal record. Witnesses described him as a gentle man, an amateur guitarist who composed music for his rock band. "He was not the kind of person who would provoke fights," his wife said. "He wouldn't harm anybody."

After six months, the investigation was dropped, because of "an inability to find the perpetrator or perpetrators," as the prosecutor put it in his report. Janiszewski's family hung a cross on an oak tree near where the body was found—one of the few reminders of what the Polish press dubbed "the perfect crime."

One afternoon in the fall of 2003, Jacek Wroblewski, a thirty-eight-year-old detective in the Wroclaw police department, unlocked the safe in his office, where he stored his files, and removed a folder marked "Janiszewski." It

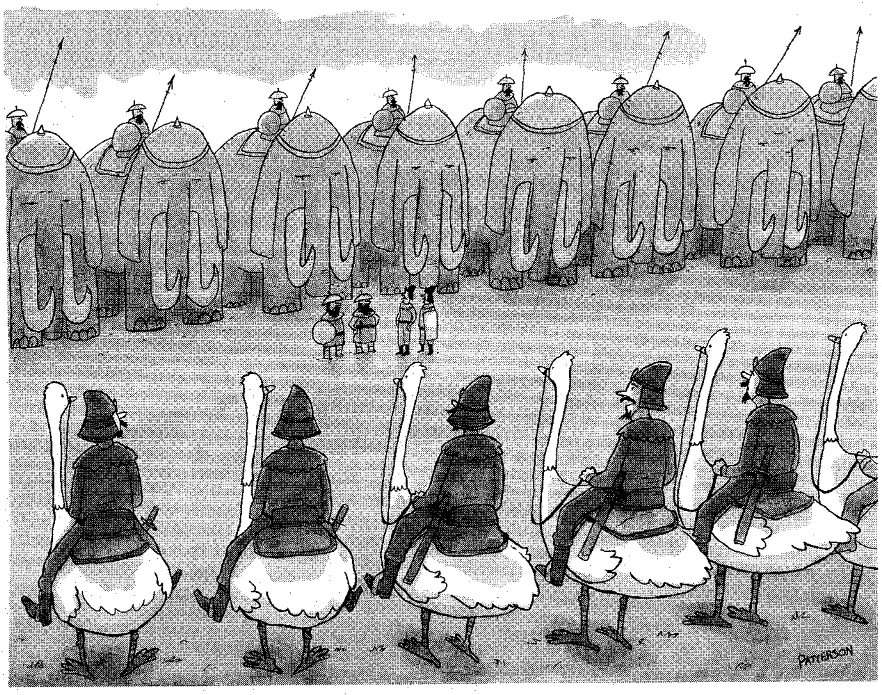
Krystian Bala (left) insisted that his violent novel was a sophisticated work of fiction, but Jacek Wroblewski was certain that it held the key to an unsolved murder.

was getting late, and most members of the department would soon be heading home, their thick wooden doors clapping shut, one after the other, in the long stone corridor of the fortresslike building, which the Germans had built in the early twentieth century, when Wroclaw was still part of Germany. (The building has underground tunnels leading to the jail and the courthouse, across the street.) Wroblewski, who preferred to work late at night, kept by his desk a coffeepot and a small refrigerator; that was about all he could squeeze into the cell-like room, which was decorated with wall-sized maps of Poland and with calendars of scantily clad women, which he took down when he had official visitors.

The Janiszewski case was three years old, and had been handed over to Wroblewski's unit by the local police who had conducted the original investigation. The unsolved murder was the coldest of cold cases, and Wroblewski was drawn to it. He was a tall, lumbering man with a pink, fleshy face and a burgeoning paunch. He wore ordinary slacks and a shirt to work, instead of a uniform, and there was a simplicity to his appearance, which he used to his advantage: people trusted him because they thought that they had no reason to fear him. Even his superiors joked that his cases must somehow solve themselves. "Jacek" is "Jack" in English, and *wróbel* means "sparrow," and so his colleagues called him Jack Sparrow—the name of the Johnny Depp character in "Pirates of the Caribbean." Wroblewski liked to say in response, "I'm more of an eagle."

After Wroblewski graduated from high school, in 1984, he began searching for his "purpose in life," as he put it, working variously as a municipal clerk, a locksmith, a soldier, an aircraft mechanic, and, in defiance of the Communist government, a union organizer allied with Solidarity. In 1994, five years after the Communist regime collapsed, he joined the newly refashioned police force. Salaries for police officers in Poland were, and remain, dismal—a rookie earns only a few thousand dollars a year—and Wroblewski had a wife and two children to support. Still, he had finally found a position that suited him. A man with a stark Catholic vision of good and evil, he relished chasing criminals, and after putting away his first murderer he hung a pair of goat horns on his office wall, to symbolize the capture of his prey. During his few free hours, he studied psychology at a local university: he wanted to understand the criminal mind.

Wroblewski had heard about the murder of Janiszewski, but he was unfamiliar with the details, and he sat down at his desk to review the file. He knew that, in cold cases, the key to solving the crime is often an overlooked clue buried in the original file. He studied the pathologist's report and the photographs of the crime scene. The level of brutality, Wroblewski thought, suggested that the perpetrator, or perpetrators, had a deep grievance against Janiszewski. Moreover, the virtual absence of clothing on Janiszewski's battered body indicated that he had been stripped, in an attempt to humiliate him. (There was no evidence of sexual abuse.) According to Janiszewski's wife, her husband always carried credit cards, but they had not been used after the crime—another indication that this was no mere robbery.



"I sure hope the negotiations go well."

Wroblewski read the various statements that had been given to the local police. The most revealing was from Janiszewski's mother, who had worked as a bookkeeper in his advertising firm. On the day that her son disappeared, she stated, a man had called the office at around 9:30 A.M., looking for him. The caller made an urgent request. "Could you make three signs, quite big ones, and the third one as big as a billboard?" he asked. When she inquired further, he said, "I will not talk to you about this," demanding again to speak to her son. She explained that he was out of the office, but she gave the caller Janiszewski's cell-phone number. The man hung up. He had not identified himself, and Janiszewski's mother had not recognized his voice, though she thought that he sounded "professional." During the conversation, she had heard noise in the background, a dull roar. Later, when her son showed up at the office, she asked him if the customer had called, and Janiszewski replied that they had arranged to meet that afternoon. According to a receptionist in the building, who was the last known person to see Janiszewski alive, he departed the office at around four o'clock. He left his car, a Peugeot, in the parking lot, which his family said was very unusual: although he often met with customers away from the office, he habitually took his car.

Investigators, upon checking phone records, discovered that the call to Janiszewski's office had come from a phone booth down the street—this explained the background noise, Wroblewski thought. Records also indicated that, less than a minute after the call ended, someone at the same public phone had rung Janiszewski's cell phone. Though the calls were suspicious, Wroblewski could not be certain that the caller was a perpetrator, just as he could not yet say how many assailants were involved in the crime. Janiszewski was more than six feet tall and weighed some two hundred pounds, and tying him up and disposing of his body may have required accomplices. The receptionist reported that when Janiszewski left the office, she had seen two men seemingly trailing him, though she could not describe them in any detail. Whoever was behind the abduction, Wroblewski thought, had been extremely organized and shrewd. The mastermind—Wroblewski assumed it was a man, based on the caller's voice—must have studied Janiszewski's business routine and known how to lure him out of his office and, possibly, into a car.

YOUR METER IS RUNNING LOW.
WARP

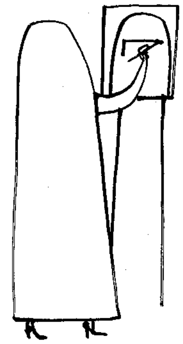
More Useful Doomsayers

Wroblewski pored over the materials, trying to find something more, yet he remained stymied. After several hours, he locked the file in his safe, but over the next several days and nights he took it out again and again. At one point, he realized that Janiszewski's cell phone had never been found. Wroblewski decided to see if the phone could be traced—an unlikely possibility. Poland lagged behind other European countries in technological development, and its financially strapped police force was only beginning to adopt more sophisticated methods of tracking cellular and computer communications. Nevertheless, Wroblewski had taken a keen interest in these new techniques, and he began an elaborate search, with the help of the department's recently hired telecommunications specialist. Although Janiszewski's telephone number had not been used since his disappearance, Wroblewski knew that cell phones often bear a serial number from the manufacturer, and his men contacted Janiszewski's wife, who provided a receipt containing this information. To Wroblewski's astonishment, he and his colleague soon found a match: a cell phone with the same serial number had been sold on Allegro, an Internet auction site, four days after Janiszewski disappeared. The seller had logged in as ChrisB[7], who, investigators learned, was a thirty-year-old Polish intellectual named Krystian Bala.

It seemed inconceivable that a murderer who had orchestrated such a well-planned crime would have sold the victim's cell phone on an Internet auction site. Bala, Wroblewski realized, could have obtained it from someone else, or purchased it at a pawnshop, or even found it on the street. Bala had since moved abroad, and could not be easily reached, but as Wroblewski checked into his background he discovered that he had recently published a novel called "Amok." Wroblewski obtained a copy, which had on the cover a surreal image of a goat—an ancient symbol of the Devil. Like the works of the French novelist Michel Houellebecq, the book is sadistic, pornographic, and creepy. The main character, who narrates the story, is a bored Polish intellectual who, when not musing about philosophy, is drinking and having sex with women.

Wroblewski, who read mostly history books, was shocked by the novel's contents, which were not only decadent but vehemently anti-Church. He made note of the fact that the narrator murders a female lover for no reason ("What had come over me? What the hell did I do?") and conceals the act so well that he is never caught. Wroblewski was struck, in particular, by the killer's method: "I tightened the noose around her neck." Wroblewski then noticed something else: the killer's name is Chris, the English version of the author's first name. It was also the name that Krystian Bala had posted on the Internet auction site. Wroblewski began to read the book more closely—a hardened cop turned literary detective.

Four years earlier, in the spring of 1999, Krystian Bala sat in a café in Wroclaw, wearing a three-piece suit. He was going to be filmed for a documentary called "Young Money," about the new generation of businessmen in the suddenly freewheeling Polish capitalist system. Bala, who was then twenty-six, had been chosen for the documentary because he had started an industrial cleaning business that used advanced machinery from the United States. Though Bala had dressed up for the occasion, he looked more like a brooding poet than like a businessman. He had dark, ruminative eyes and thick curly brown hair. Slender and sensitive-looking, he was so handsome that his friends had nicknamed him Amour. He chain-smoked and spoke like a professor of philosophy, which is what he had trained, and still hoped, to become. "I don't feel like a businessman," Bala later told the interviewer, adding that he had always "dreamed of an academic career."



He had been the equivalent of high-school valedictorian and, as an undergraduate at the University of Wroclaw, which he attended from 1992 to 1997, he was considered one of the brightest philosophy students. The night before an exam, while other students were cramming, he often stayed out drinking and carousing, only to show up the next morning, dishevelled and hung over, and score the highest marks. "One time, I went out with him and nearly died taking the exam," his close friend and former classmate Lotar Rasinski, who now teaches philosophy at another university in Wroclaw, recalls. Beata Sierocka, who was one of Bala's philosophy professors, says that he had a voracious appetite for learning and an "inquisitive, rebellious mind."

Bala, who often stayed with his parents in Chojnow, a provincial town outside Wroclaw, began bringing home stacks of philosophy books, lining the hallways and filling the basement. Poland's philosophy departments had long been dominated by Marxism, which, like liberalism, is rooted in Enlightenment notions of reason and in the pursuit of universal truths. Bala, however, was drawn to the radical arguments of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who maintained that language, like a game of chess, is essentially a social activity. Bala often referred to Wittgenstein as "my master." He also seized on Friedrich Nietzsche's notorious contention that "there are no facts, only interpretations" and that "truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions."

For Bala, such subversive ideas made particular sense after the collapse of the Soviet Empire, where language and facts had been wildly manipulated to create a false sense of history. "The end of Communism marked the death of one of the great meta-narratives," Bala later told me, paraphrasing the postmodernist Jean-François Lyotard. Bala once wrote in an e-mail to a friend, "Read Wittgenstein and Nietzsche! Twenty times each!"

Bala's father, Stanislaw, who was a construction worker and a taxi-driver ("I'm a simple, uneducated man," he says), was proud of his son's academic accomplishments. Still, he occasionally wanted to throw away Krystian's books and force him to "plant with me in the garden." Stanislaw sometimes worked in France, and during the summer Krystian frequently went with him to earn extra money for his studies. "He would bring suitcases stuffed with books," Stanislaw recalls. "He would work all day and study through the night. I used to joke that he knew more about France from books than from seeing it."

By then, Bala had become entranced by French postmodernists such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. He was particularly interested in Derrida's notion that not only is language too unstable to pinpoint any absolute truth; human identity itself is the malleable product of language. Bala wrote a thesis about Richard Rorty, the American philosopher, who famously declared, "The guise of convincing your peers is the very face of truth itself."

Bala interpreted these thinkers idiosyncratically, pulling threads here and there, and often twisting and turning and distorting them, until he had braided them into his own radical philosophy. To amuse himself, he began constructing myths about himself—an adventure in Paris, a romance with a schoolmate—and tried to convince friends that they were true. "He would tell these tall stories about himself," Rasinski says. "If he told one person, and that person then told someone else, who told someone else, it became true. It existed in the language." Rasinski adds, "Krystian even had a term for it. He called it 'mytho-creativity.' " Before long, friends had trouble distinguishing his real character from the one he had invented. In an e-mail to a friend, Bala said, "If I ever write an autobiography, it will be full of myths!"

Bala cast himself as an enfant terrible who sought out what Foucault had called a "limit-experience": he wanted to push the boundaries of language and human existence, to break free of what he deemed to be the hypocritical and oppressive "truths" of Western society, including taboos on sex and drugs. Foucault himself was drawn to homosexual sadomasochism. Bala devoured the works of Georges Bataille, who vowed to "brutally oppose all systems" and who once contemplated carrying out human sacrifices; and William Burroughs, who swore to use language to "rub out the word"; and the Marquis de Sade, who demanded, "O man! Is it for you to say what is good or what is evil?" Bala boasted about his drunken visits to brothels and his submission to temptations of the flesh. He told friends that he hated "conventions" and was "capable of anything," and he insisted, "I will not live long but I will live furiously!"

Some people found such proclamations juvenile, even ridiculous; others were mesmerized by them. "There were legends that no woman could resist him," one friend recalled. Those closest to him regarded his tales simply as playful confabulations. Sierocka, his former professor, says that Bala, in reality, was always "kind, energetic, hardworking, and principled." His friend Rasinski says, "Krystian liked the idea of being this Nietzschean superman, but anyone who knew him well realized that, as with his language games, he was just playing around."

In 1995, Bala, belying his libertine posture, married his high-school sweetheart, Stanislawa—or Stasia, as he called her. Stasia, who had dropped out of high school and worked as a secretary, showed little interest in language or philosophy. Bala's mother opposed the marriage, believing Stasia was ill-suited for her son. "I thought he should at least wait until he had finished his studies," she says. But Bala insisted that he wanted to take care of Stasia, who had always loved him, and in 1997 their son Kacper was born. That year, Bala graduated from the university with the highest possible marks, and enrolled in its Ph.D. program in philosophy. Although he received a full academic scholarship, he struggled to support his family, and soon left school to open his cleaning business. In the documentary on Poland's new generation of businessmen, Bala says, "Reality came and kicked me in the ass." With an air of resignation, he continues, "Once, I planned to paint graffiti on walls. Now I'm trying to wash it off."

He was not a good businessman. Whenever money came in, colleagues say, instead of investing it in his company he spent it. By 2000, he had filed for bankruptcy. His marriage also collapsed. "The basic problem was women," his wife later said. "I knew that he was having an affair." After Stasia separated from him, he seemed despondent and left Poland, travelling to the United States, and later to Asia, where he taught English and scuba diving.

He began to work intensively on "Amok," which encapsulated all his philosophical obsessions. The story mirrors "Crime and Punishment," in which Raskolnikov, convinced that he is a superior being who can deliver his own form of justice, murders a wretched pawnbroker. "Wouldn't thousands of good deeds make up for one tiny little crime?" Raskolnikov asks. If Raskolnikov is a Frankenstein's monster of modernity, then Chris, the protagonist of "Amok," is a monster of postmodernity. In his view, not only is there no sacred being ("God, if you only existed, you'd see how sperm looks on blood"); there is also no truth ("Truth is being displaced by narrative"). One character admits that he doesn't know which of his constructed personalities is real, and Chris says, "I'm a good liar, because I believe in the lies myself."

Unbound by any sense of truth—moral, scientific, historical, biographical, legal—Chris embarks on a grisly rampage. After his wife catches him having sex with her best friend and leaves him (Chris says that he has, at least, "stripped her of her illusions"), he sleeps with one woman after another, the sex ranging from numbing to sadomasochistic. Inverting convention, he lusts after ugly women, insisting that they are "more real, more touchable, more alive." He drinks too much. He spews vulgarities, determined, as one character puts it, to pulverize the language, to "screw it like no one else has ever screwed it." He mocks traditional philosophers and blasphemes the Catholic Church. In one scene, he gets drunk with a friend and steals from a church a statue of St. Anthony—the Egyptian saint who lived secluded in the desert, battling the temptations of the Devil, and who fascinated Foucault. (Foucault, describing how St. Anthony had turned to the Bible to ward off the Devil, only to encounter a bloody description of Jews slaughtering their enemies, writes that "evil is not embodied in individuals" but "incorporated in words" and that even a book of salvation can open "the gates to Hell.")

Finally, Chris, repudiating what is considered the ultimate moral truth, kills his girlfriend Mary. "I tightened the noose around her neck, holding her down with one hand," he says. "With my other hand, I stabbed the knife below her left breast. . . . Everything was covered in blood." He then ejaculates on her. In a perverse echo of Wittgenstein's notion that some actions defy language, Chris says of the killing, "There was no noise, no words, no movement. Complete silence."

In "Crime and Punishment," Raskolnikov confesses his sins and is punished for them, while being redeemed by the love of a woman named Sonya, who helps to guide him back toward a pre-modern Christian order. But Chris never removes what he calls his "white gloves of silence," and he is never punished. ("Murder leaves no stain," he declares.) And his wife—who, not coincidentally, is also named Sonya—never returns to him.

The style and structure of "Amok," which is derivative of many postmodern novels, reinforces the idea that truth is illusory—what is a novel, anyway, but a lie, a mytho-creation? Bala's narrator often addresses the reader, reminding him that he is being seduced by a work of fiction. "I am starting my story," Chris says. "I must avoid boring you." In another typical flourish, Chris reveals that he is reading a book about the violent rebellion of a young author with a "guilty conscience"—in other words, the same story as "Amok."

Throughout the book, Bala plays with words in order to emphasize their slipperiness. The title of one chapter, "Screwdriver," refers simultaneously to the tool, the cocktail, and Chris's sexual behavior. Even when Chris slaughters Mary, it feels like a language game. "I pulled the knife and rope from under-

"I hated how they acted so much 'greener than thou.'"

neath the bed, as if I were about to begin a children's fairy tale," Chris says. "Then I started unwinding this fable of rope, and to make it more interesting I started to make a noose. It took me two million years."

Bala finished the book toward the end of 2002. He had given Chris a biography similar to his own, blurring the boundary between author and narrator. He even posted sections of the book on a blog called Amok, and during discussions with readers he wrote comments under the name Chris, as if he were the character. After the book came out, in 2003, an interviewer asked him, "Some authors write only to release their . . . Mr. Hyde, the dark side of their psyche—do you agree?" Bala joked in response, "I know what you are driving at, but I won't comment. It might turn out that Krystian Bala is the creation of Chris . . . not the other way around."

Few bookstores in Poland carried "Amok," in part because of the novel's shocking content, and those which did placed it on the highest shelves, out of the reach of children. (The book has not been translated into English.) On the Internet, a couple of reviewers praised "Amok." "We haven't had this kind of book in Polish literature," one wrote, adding that it was "paralyzingly realistic, totally vulgar, full of paranoid and delirious images." Another called it a "masterpiece of illusion." Yet most readers considered the book, as one major Polish newspaper put it, to be "without literary merit." Even one of Bala's friends dismissed it as "rubbish." When Sierocka, the philosophy professor, opened it, she was stunned by its crude language, which was the antithesis of the straightforward, intelligent style of the papers that Bala had written at the university. "Frankly, I found the book hard to read," she says. An ex-girlfriend of Bala's later said, "I was shocked by the book, because he never used those words. He never acted obscenely or vulgar toward me. Our sex life was normal."

Many of Bala's friends believed that he wanted to do in his fiction what he never did in life: shatter every taboo. In the interview that Bala gave after "Amok" was published, he said, "I wrote the book not caring about any convention. . . . A simple reader will find inter-

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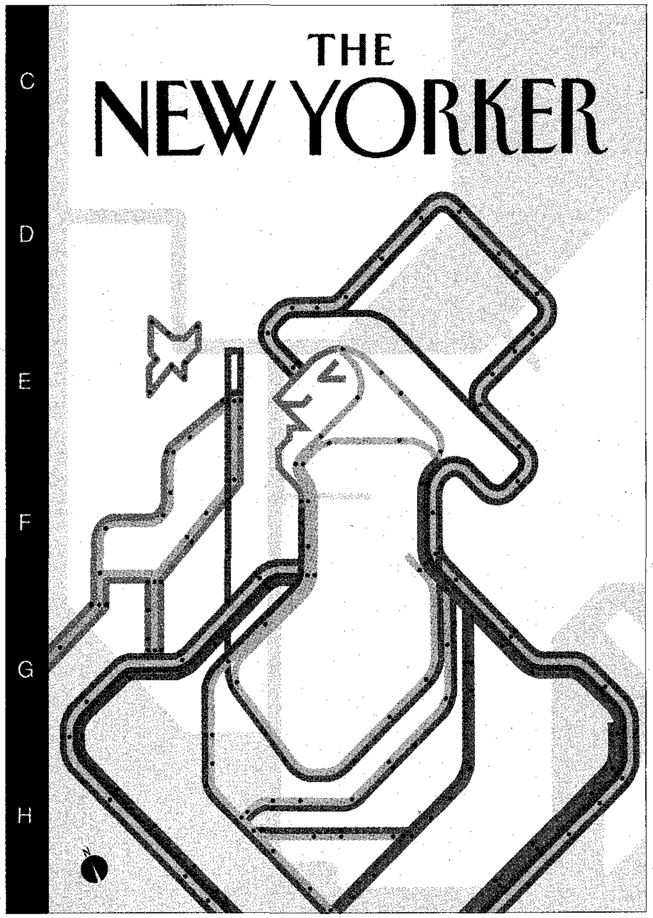
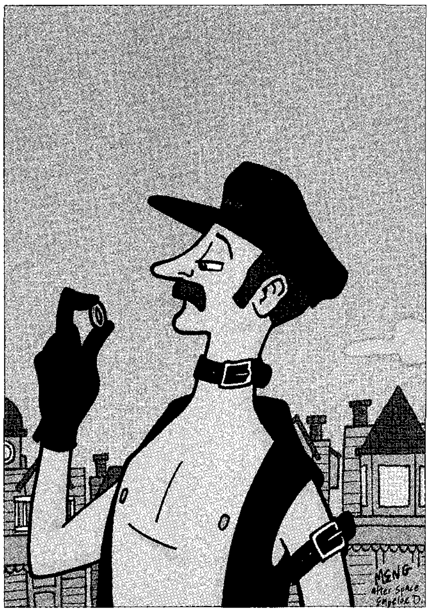
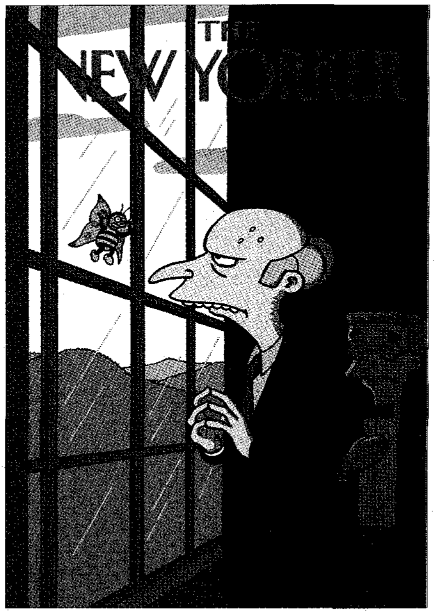
ALBUM

YOUR EUSTACE

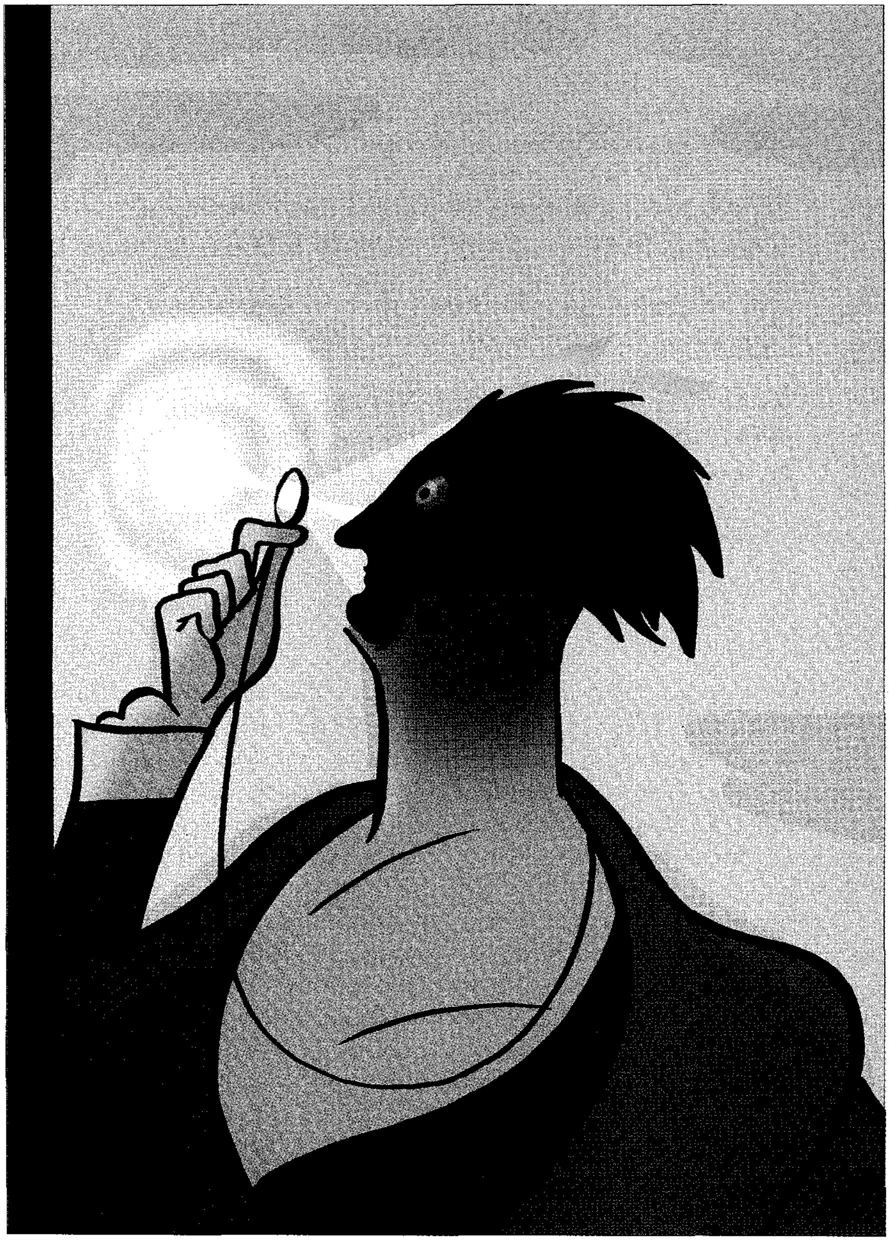
Recently, we held a contest on our Web site to redefine Eustace Tilley, the magazine's presiding dandy. Readers posted nearly three hundred ideas, from the erotic to the pontifical. The winners can be seen on newyorker.com, and a selection appears here.

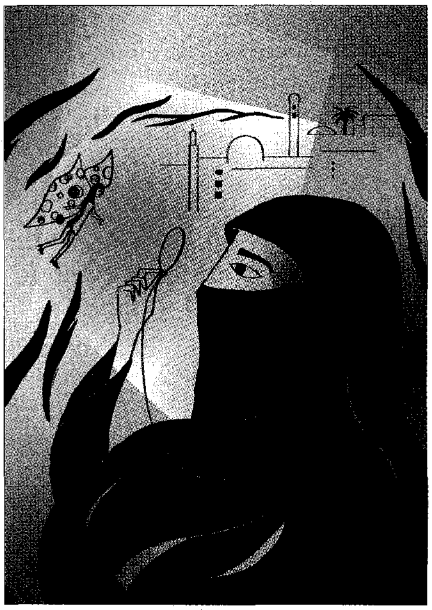


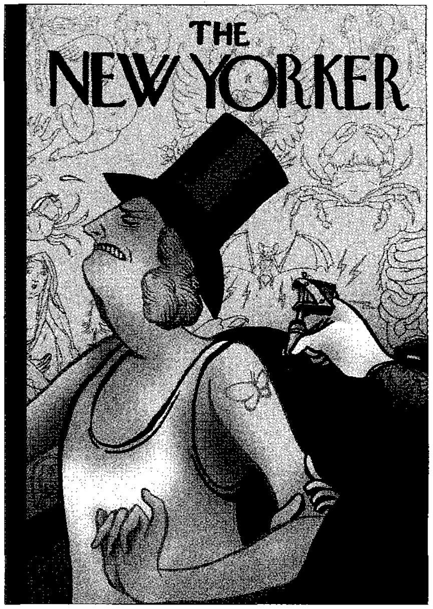




CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ALBERTO FORERO, ADAM KOFORD, M.P. WIGGINS, BRIAN BUTLER, LIZ RATHKE, STEPHANIE SCHEAFER, LEN PERALTA, GARY AMARO AND CLAIRE B. COTTS, JERROLD CONNORS



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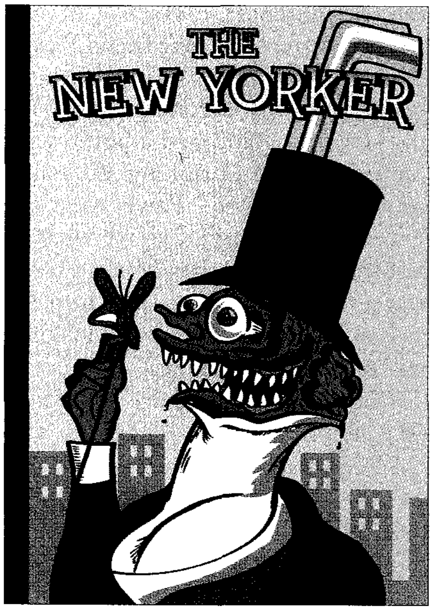
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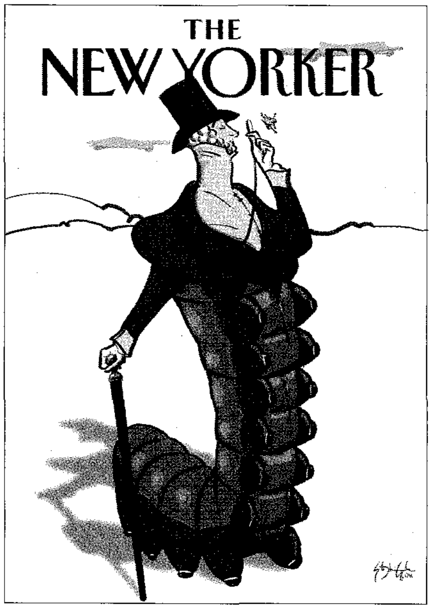
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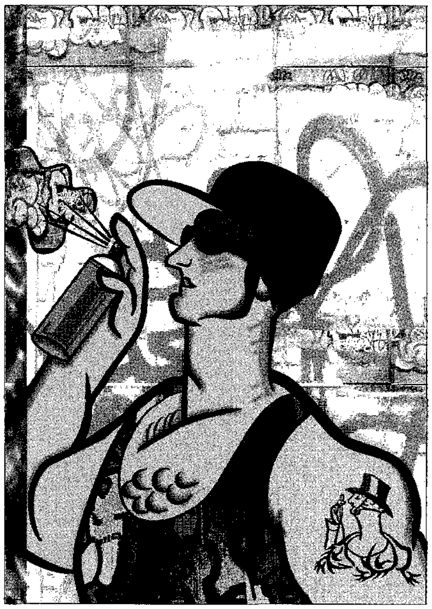


esting only a few violent scenes with a graphic description of people having sex. But if someone really looks, he will see that these scenes are intended to awaken the reader and . . . show how fucked up and impoverished and hypocritical this world is.”

By Bala’s own estimate, “Amok” sold only a couple of thousand copies. But he was confident that it would eventually find its place among the great works of literature. “I’m truly convinced that one day my book will be appreciated,” he said. “History teaches that some works of art have to wait ages before they are recognized.”

In at least one respect, the book succeeded. Chris was so authentically creepy that it was hard not to believe that he was the product of a genuinely disturbed mind, and that he and the author were indeed indistinguishable. On Bala’s Web site, readers described him and his work as “grotesque,” “sexist,” and “psychopathic.” During an Internet conversation, in June of 2003, a friend told Bala that his book did not give the reader a good impression of him. When Bala assured her that the book was fiction, she insisted that Chris’s musings had to be “your thoughts.” Bala became irritated. Only a fool, he said, would believe that.

THE *SAWS*

The saying *dead as a doornail* is still dead as a doornail:
Whatever a doornail might be or was, long lost in the dark,

The dark, the dark—not always deepest before dawn, Pal.
Back then, passing a graveyard you might actually whistle:

No walk in the park, a black back street back in the day.
Zombie expressions, Buddy, as thin as a spare dime.

Generated by generations they still stagger the castle,
Wan, rife. Benighted or bedazed by the March of Time,

Time, time. The old saws hardly ever anymore called saws:
Kiss the cat and you kiss the fleas. And *That’s the story of my life*.

—*Robert Pinsky*

Detective Wroblewski underlined various passages as he studied “Amok.” At first glance, few details of Mary’s murder resembled the killing of Janiszewski. Most conspicuously, the victim in the novel is a woman, and the killer’s longtime friend. Moreover, although Mary has a noose around her neck, she gets stabbed, with a Japanese knife, and Janiszewski wasn’t. One detail in the book, however, chilled Wroblewski: after the murder, Chris says, “I sell the Japanese knife on an Internet auction.” The similarity to the selling of Janiszewski’s cell phone on the Internet—a detail that the police had never released to the public—seemed too extraordinary to be a coincidence.

At one point in “Amok,” Chris intimates that he has also killed a man. When one of his girlfriends doubts his endless mytho-creations, he says, “Which story didn’t you believe—that my radio station went bankrupt or that I killed a man who behaved inappropriately toward me ten years ago?” He adds of the murder, “Everyone considers it a fable. Maybe it’s better that way. Fuck. Sometimes I don’t believe it myself.”

Wroblewski had never read about postmodernism or language games. For him, facts were as indissoluble as bullets. You either killed someone or you didn’t. His job was to piece together a logical chain of evidence that revealed the irrefutable truth. But Wroblewski also believed that, in order to catch a killer, you had to understand the social and psychological forces that had formed him. And so, if Bala had murdered Janiszewski or participated in the crime—as Wroblewski now fully suspected—then Wroblewski, the empiricist, would have to become a postmodernist.

To the surprise of members of his detective squad, Wroblewski made copies of the novel and handed them out. Everyone was assigned a chapter to “interpret”: to try to find any clues, any coded messages, any parallels with reality. Because Bala was living outside the country, Wroblewski warned his colleagues not to do anything that might alarm the author. Wroblewski knew that if Bala did not voluntarily return home to see his family, as he periodically did, it would be virtually impossible for the Polish police to apprehend him. At least for the moment, the police had to refrain from questioning Bala’s family and friends. Instead, Wroblewski and his team combed public records and interrogated Bala’s more distant associates, constructing a profile of the suspect, which they then compared with the profile of Chris in the novel. Wroblewski kept an unofficial scorecard: both Bala and his literary creation were consumed by philosophy, had been abandoned by their wives, had a company go bankrupt, travelled around the world, and drank too much. Wroblewski discovered that Bala had once been detained by the police, and when he obtained the official report it was as if he had already read it. As Bala’s friend Pawel, who was detained with him, later testified in court, “Krystian came to me in the evening and had a bottle with him. We started drinking. Actually, we drank till dawn.” Pawel went on, “The alcohol ran out, so we went to a store to buy another bottle. As we were returning from the shop we passed by a church, and this is when we had a very stupid idea.”

“What idea did you have?” the judge asked him.

“We went into the church and we saw St. Anthony’s figure, and we took it.”

“What for?” the judge inquired.

“Well, we wanted a third person to

drink with. Krystian said afterward that we were crazy."

In the novel, when the police catch Chris and his friend drinking beside the statue of St. Anthony, Chris says, "We were threatened by prison! I was speechless. . . . I do not feel like a criminal, but I became one. I had done much worse things in my life, and never suffered any consequences."

Wroblewski began to describe "Amok" as a "road map" to a crime, but some authorities objected that he was pushing the investigation in a highly suspect direction. The police asked a criminal psychologist to analyze the character of Chris, in order to gain insight into Bala. The psychologist wrote in her report, "The character of Chris is an egocentric man with great intellectual ambitions. He perceives himself as an intellectual with his own philosophy, based on his education and high I.Q. His way of functioning shows features of psychopathic behavior. He is testing the limits to see if he can actually carry out his . . . sadistic fantasies. He treats people with disrespect, considers them to be intellectually inferior to himself, uses manipulation to fulfill his own needs, and is determined to satiate his sexual desires in a hedonistic way. If such a character were real—a true living person—his personality could have been shaped by a highly unrealistic sense of his own worth. It could also be . . . a result of psychological wounds and his insecurities as a man . . . pathological relationships with his parents or unacceptable homosexual tendencies." The psychologist acknowledged the links between Bala and Chris, such as divorce and philosophical interests, but cautioned that such overlaps were "common with novelists." And she warned, "Basing an analysis of the author on his fictional character would be a gross violation."

Wroblewski knew that details in the novel did not qualify as evidence—they had to be corroborated independently. So far, though, he had only one piece of concrete evidence linking Bala to the victim: the cell phone. In February, 2002, the Polish television program "997," which, like "America's Most Wanted," solicits the public's help in solving crimes (997 is the emergency telephone number in Poland), aired a segment devoted to Janiszewski's murder. Afterward, the show posted on its Web site the latest news about the progress of the investigation, and asked for tips. Wroblewski and his men carefully analyzed the responses. Over the years, hundreds of people had visited the Web site, from places as far away as Japan, South Korea, and the United States. Yet the police didn't turn up a single fruitful lead.

When Wroblewski and the telecommunications expert checked to see if Bala had purchased or sold any other items on the Internet while logged on as ChrisB[7], they made a curious discovery. On October 17, 2000, a month before Janiszewski was kidnapped, Bala had clicked on the Allegro auction site for a police manual called "Accidental, Suicidal, or Criminal Hanging." "Hanging a mature, conscious, healthy, and physically fit person is very difficult even for several people," the manual stated, and described various ways that a noose might be tied. Bala did not purchase the book on Allegro, and it was unclear if he obtained it elsewhere, but that he was seeking such information was, at least to Wroblewski, a sign of premeditation. Still, Wroblewski knew that if he wanted to convict Bala of murder he would need more than the circumstantial evidence he had gathered: he would need a confession.

Bala remained abroad, supporting himself by publishing articles in travel magazines, and by teaching English and scuba diving. In January of 2005, while visiting Micronesia, he sent an e-mail to a friend, saying, "I'm writing this letter from paradise."

Finally, that fall, Wroblewski learned that Bala was coming home.

"At approximately 2:30 P.M., after leaving a drugstore at Legnicka Street, in Chojnow, I was attacked by three men," Bala later wrote in a statement, describing what happened to him on September 5, 2005, shortly after he returned to his home town. "One of them twisted my arms behind my back; another squeezed my throat so that I could not speak, and could barely breathe. Meanwhile, the third one handcuffed me."

Bala said that his attackers were tall and muscular, with close-cropped hair, like skinheads. Without telling Bala who they were or what they wanted, they forced him into a dark-green vehicle and slipped a black plastic bag over his head. "I couldn't see anything," Bala said. "They ordered me to lie face down on the floor."

Bala said that his assailants continued to beat him, shouting, "You fucking prick! You motherfucker!" He pleaded with them to leave him alone and not hurt him. Then he heard one of the men say on a cell phone, "Hi, boss! We got the shithead! Yes, he's still alive. So now what? At the meeting point?" The man continued, "And what about the money? Will we get it today?"

Bala said he thought that, because he lived abroad and was known to be a writer, the men assumed that he was wealthy and were seeking a ransom. "I tried to explain to them that I didn't have money," Bala stated. The more he spoke, though, the more brutally they attacked him.

Eventually, the car came to a stop, apparently in a wooded area. "We can dig a hole for this shit here and bury him," one of the men said. Bala struggled to breathe through the plastic bag. "I thought that this was going to be the last moment of my life, but suddenly they got back into the car and began driving again," he said.

After a long time, the car came to another stop, and the men shoved him out of the car and into a building. "I didn't hear a door, but because there was no wind or sun I assumed that we had entered," Bala said. The men threatened to kill him if he didn't coöperate, then led him upstairs into a small room, where they stripped him, deprived him of food, beat him, and began to interrogate him. Only then, Bala said, did he realize that he was in police custody and had been brought in for questioning by a man called Jack Sparrow.

"None of it happened," Wroblewski later told me. "We used standard procedures and followed the letter of the law."

According to Wroblewski and other officers, they apprehended Bala by the drugstore without violence and drove him to police headquarters in Wroclaw. Wroblewski and Bala sat facing each other in the detective's cramped office; a light bulb overhead cast a faint glow, and Bala could see on the wall the goat horns that eerily resembled the image on the cover of his book. Bala appeared gentle and scholarly, yet Wroblewski recalled how, in "Amok," Chris says, "It's easier for people to imagine that Christ can turn urine into beer than that someone like me can send to Hell some asshole smashed into a lump of ground meat."

Wroblewski initially circled around the subject of the murder, trying to elicit offhand information about Bala's business and his relationships, and concealing what the police already knew about the crime—an interrogator's chief advantage. When Wroblewski did confront him about the killing, Bala looked dumbfounded. "I didn't know Dariusz Janiszewski," he said. "I know nothing about the murder."

Wroblewski pressed him about the curious details in "Amok." Bala later told me, "It was insane. He treated the book as if it were my literal autobiography. He must have read the book a hundred times. He knew it by heart." When Wroblewski mentioned several "facts" in the novel, such as the theft of the statue of St. Anthony, Bala acknowledged that he had drawn certain elements from his life. As Bala put it to me, "Sure, I'm guilty of that. Show me an author who *doesn't* do that."

Wroblewski then played his trump card: the cell phone. How did Bala get hold of it? Bala said that he couldn't remember—it was five years ago. Then he said that he must have bought the phone at a pawnshop, as he had done several times in the past. He agreed to take a polygraph test.

Wroblewski helped to prepare the questions for the examiner, who asked:

> Just before Dariusz Janiszewski lost his life, did you know this would happen?
>
> Were you the one who killed him?
>
> Do you know who actually murdered him?
>
> Did you know Janiszewski?
>
> Were you in the place where Janiszewski was held hostage?

Bala replied no to each question. Periodically, he seemed to slow his breathing, in the manner of a scuba diver. The examiner wondered if he was trying to manipulate the test. On some questions, the examiner suspected Bala of lying, but, over all, the results were inconclusive.

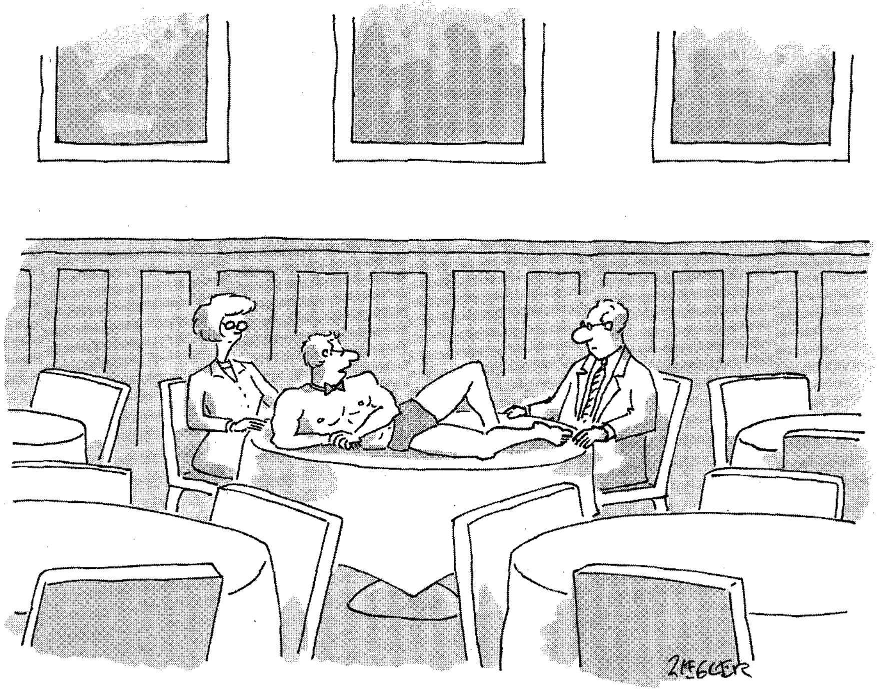
In Poland, after a suspect is detained for forty-eight hours, the prosecutor in the case is required to present his evidence before a judge and charge the suspect; otherwise, the police must release him. The case against Bala remained weak. All Wroblewski and the police had was the cell phone, which Bala could have obtained, as he claimed, from a pawnshop; the sketchy results of a polygraph, a notoriously unreliable test; a book on hanging that Bala might not even have purchased; and clues possibly embedded in a novel. Wroblewski had no motive or confession. As a result, the authorities charged Bala only with selling stolen property—Janiszewski's phone—and with paying a bribe in an unrelated business matter, which Wroblewski had uncovered during the course of his investigation. Wroblewski knew that neither charge would likely carry any jail time, and although Bala had to remain in the country and relinquish his passport, he was otherwise a free man. "I had spent two years trying to build a case, and I was watching it all collapse," Wroblewski recalled.

Later, as he was flipping through Bala's passport, Wroblewski noticed stamps from Japan, South Korea, and the United States. He remembered that the Web site of the television show "997" had recorded page views from all of those countries—a fact that had baffled investigators. Why would anyone so far away be interested in a local Polish murder? Wroblewski compared the periods when Bala was in each country with the timing of the page views. The dates matched.

"And don't think you're just going to flare your nostrils out of this one!"

Bala, meanwhile, was becoming a cause célèbre. As Wroblewski continued to investigate him for murder, Bala filed a formal grievance with the authorities, claiming that he had been kidnapped and tortured. When Bala told his friend Rasinski that he was being persecuted for his art, Rasinski was incredulous. "I figured that he was testing out some crazy idea for his next novel," he recalls. Soon after, Wroblewski questioned Rasinski about his friend. "That's when I realized that Krystian was telling the truth," Rasinski says.

Rasinski was shocked when Wroblewski began to grill him about "Amok." "I told him that I recognized some details from real life, but that, to me, the book was a work of fiction," Rasinski says. "This was crazy. You cannot prosecute a man based on the novel he



"Hi, I'm Todd, and I'll be your centerpiece tonight."

wrote." Beata Sierocka, Bala's former professor, who was also called in for questioning, says that she felt as if she were being interrogated by "literary theorists."

As outrage over the investigation mounted, one of Bala's girlfriends, Denise Rinehart, set up a defense committee on his behalf. Rinehart, an American theatre director, met Bala while she was studying in Poland, in 2001, and they had subsequently travelled together to the United States and South Korea. Rinehart solicited support over the Internet, writing, "Krystian is the author of a fictional philosophical book called 'Amok.' A lot of the language and content is strong and there are several metaphors that might be considered against the Catholic Church and Polish tradition. During his brutal interrogation they referenced his book numerous times, citing it as proof of his guilt."

Dubbing the case the Sprawa Absurd—the Absurd Matter—the committee contacted human-rights organizations and International PEN. Before long, the Polish Justice Ministry was deluged with letters on Bala's behalf from around the world. One said, "Mr. Bala deserves his rights in accordance with Article 19 of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights that guarantees the right to freedom of expression. . . . We urge you to insure there is an immediate and thorough investigation into his kidnapping and imprisonment and that all of those found responsible are brought to justice."

Bala, writing in imperfect English, sent out frantic bulletins to the defense committee, which published them in a newsletter. In a bulletin on September 13, 2005, Bala warned that he was being "spied" on and said, "I want you to know that I will fight until the end." The next day, he said of Wroblewski and the police, "They have ruined my family life. We will never talk loud at home again. We will never use internet freely again. We will never make any phone calls not thinking about who is listening. My mother takes some pills to stay calm. Otherwise she would get insane, because of this absurd accusation. My old father smokes 50 cigs a day and I smoke three packs. We all sleep 3-4 hours daily and we are afraid of leaving a house. Every single bark of our little dog alerts us and we don't know what or who to expect. It's a terror! Quiet Terror!"

The Polish authorities, meanwhile, had launched an internal investigation into Bala's allegations of mistreatment. In early 2006, after months of probing, the investigators declared that they had found no corroborating evidence. In this instance, they insisted, Bala's tale was indeed a mytho-creation.

"I have infected you," Chris warns the reader at the beginning of "Amok." "You will not be able to get free of me." Wroblewski remained haunted by one riddle in the novel, which, he believed, was crucial to solving the case. A character asks Chris, "Who was the one-eyed man among the blind?" The phrase derives from Erasmus (1469-1536), the Dutch theologian and classical scholar, who said, "In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." Who in "Amok," Wroblewski wondered, was the one-eyed man? And who were the blind men? In the novel's last line, Chris suddenly claims that he has solved the riddle, explaining, "This was the one killed by blind jealousy." But the sentence, with its strange lack of context, made little sense.

One hypothesis based on "Amok" was that Bala had murdered Janiszewski after beginning a homosexual affair with him. In the novel, after Chris's closest friend confesses that he is gay, Chris says that part of him wanted to "strangle him with a rope" and "chop a hole in a frozen river and dump him there." Still, the theory seemed dubious. Wroblewski had thoroughly investigated Janiszewski's background and there was no indication that he was gay.

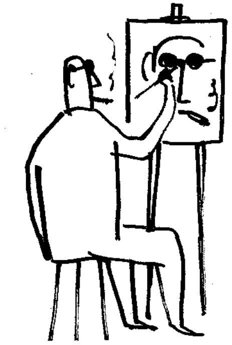
Another theory was that the murder was the culmination of Bala's twisted philosophy—that he was a postmodern version of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, the two brilliant Chicago students who, in the nineteen-twenties, were so entranced by Nietzsche's ideas that they killed a fourteen-year-old boy to see if they could execute the perfect murder and become supermen. At their trial, in which they received life sentences, Clarence Darrow, the legendary defense attorney who represented them, said of Leopold, "Here is a boy at sixteen or seventeen becoming obsessed with these doctrines. It was not a casual bit of philosophy with him; it was his life." Darrow, trying to save the boys from the death penalty, concluded, "Is there any blame attached because somebody took Nietzsche's philosophy seriously and fashioned his life upon it? . . . It is hardly fair to hang a nineteen-year-old boy for the philosophy that was taught him at the university."

In "Amok," Chris clearly aspires to be a postmodern *Übermensch*, speaking of his "will to power" and insisting that anyone who is "unable to kill should not stay alive." Yet these sentiments did not fully explain the murder of the unknown man in the novel, who, Chris says, had "behaved inappropriately" toward him. Chris, alluding to what happened between them, says teasingly, "Maybe he didn't do *anything significant*, but the most vicious Devil is in the details." If Bala's philosophy had justified, in his mind, a break from moral constraints, including the prohibition on murder, these passages suggested that there was still another motive, a deep personal connection to the victim—something that the brutality of the crime also indicated. With Bala unable to leave Poland, Wroblewski and his team began to question the suspect's closest friends and family.

Many of those interrogated saw Bala positively—"a bright, interesting man," one of his former girlfriends said of him. Bala had recently received a reference from a past employer at an English-instruction school in Poland, which described him as "intelligent," "inquisitive," and "easy to get along with," and praised his "keen sense of humor." The reference concluded, "With no reservation, I highly recommend Krystian Bala for any teaching position with children."

Yet, as Wroblewski and his men deepened their search for the "Devil in the details," a darker picture of Bala's life began to emerge. The years 1999 and 2000, during which time his business and his marriage collapsed—and Janiszewski was murdered—had been especially troubled. A friend recalled that Bala once "started to behave vulgarly and wanted to take his clothes off and show his manliness." The family babysitter described him as increasingly drunk and out of control. She said he constantly berated his wife, Stasia, shouting at her that "she slept around and cheated on him."

According to several people, after Bala and his wife separated, in 2000, he remained possessive of her. A friend, who called Bala an "authoritarian type," said of him, "He continuously controlled Stasia, and checked her phones." At a New Year's Eve party in 2000, just weeks after Janiszewski's body was found, Bala thought a bartender was making advances toward his wife and, as one witness put it, "went crazy." Bala screamed that he would take care of the bartender and that he had "already dealt with such a guy." At the time, Stasia and her friends had dismissed his drunken outburst. Even so, it took five people to restrain Bala; as one of them told police, "He was running amok."



As Wroblewski and his men were trying to fix on a motive, other members of the squad stepped up their efforts to trace the two suspicious telephone calls that had been made to Janiszewski's office and to his cell phone on the day he disappeared. The public telephone from which both calls were made was operated with a card. Each card was embedded with a unique number that registered with the phone company whenever it was used. Not long after Bala was released, the telecommunications expert on the Janiszewski case was able to determine the number on the caller's card. Once the police had that information, officials could trace all the telephone numbers dialled with that same card. Over a three-month period, thirty-two calls had been made. They included calls to Bala's parents, his girlfriend, his friends, and a business associate. "The truth was becoming clearer and clearer," Wroblewski said.

Wroblewski and his team soon uncovered another connection between the victim and the suspect. Malgorzata Drozdzal, a friend of Stasia's, told the police that in the summer of 2000 she had gone with Stasia to a night club called Crazy Horse, in Wroclaw. While Drozdzal was dancing, she saw Stasia talking to a man with long hair and bright-blue eyes. She recognized him from around town. His name was Dariusz Janiszewski.

Wroblewski had one last person to question: Stasia. But she had steadfastly refused to coöperate. Perhaps she was afraid of her ex-husband. Perhaps she believed Bala's claim that he was being persecuted by the police. Or perhaps she dreaded the idea of one day telling her son that she had betrayed his father.

Wroblewski and his men approached Stasia again, this time showing her sections of "Amok," which was published after she and Bala had split up, and which she had never looked at closely. According to Polish authorities, Stasia examined passages involving Chris's wife, Sonya, and was so disturbed by the character's similarities to her that she finally agreed to talk.

She confirmed that she had met Janiszewski at Crazy Horse. "I had ordered French fries, and I asked a man next to the bar whether the French fries were ready," Stasia recalled. "That man was Dariusz." They spent the entire night talking, she said, and Janiszewski gave her his phone number. Later, they went on a date and checked into a motel. But before anything happened, she said, Janiszewski admitted that he was married, and she left. "Since I know what it's like to be a wife whose husband betrays her, I didn't want to do that to another woman," Stasia said. The difficulties in Janiszewski's marriage soon ended, and he and Stasia never went out together again.

Several weeks after her date with Janiszewski, Stasia said, Bala showed up at her place in a drunken fury, demanding that she admit to having an affair with Janiszewski. He broke down the front door and struck her. He shouted that he had hired a private detective and knew everything. "He also mentioned that he had visited Dariusz's office, and described it to me," Stasia recalled. "Then he said he knew which hotel we went to and what room we were in."

Later, when she learned that Janiszewski had disappeared, Stasia said, she asked Bala if he had anything to do with it, and he said no. She did not pursue the matter, believing that Bala, for all his tumultuous behavior, was incapable of murder.

For the first time, Wroblewski thought he understood the last line of "Amok": "This was the one killed by blind jealousy."

Spectators flooded into the courtroom in Wroclaw on February 22, 2007, the first day of Bala's trial. There were philosophers, who argued with each other over the consequences of postmodernism; young lawyers, who wanted to learn about the police department's new investigative techniques; and reporters, who chronicled every tantalizing detail. "Killing doesn't make much of an impression in the twenty-first century, but allegedly killing and then writing about it in a novel is front-page news," a front-page article in *Angora*, a weekly based in Lodz, declared.

The judge, Lydia Hojenska, sat at the head of the courtroom, beneath an emblem of the white Polish eagle. In accordance with Polish law, the presiding judge, along with another judge and three citizens, acted as the jury. The defense and the prosecution sat at two unadorned wooden tables; next to the prosecutors were Janiszewski's widow and his parents, his mother holding a picture of her son. The public congregated in the back of the room, and in the last row was a stout, nervous woman with short red hair, who looked as if her own life were at stake. It was Bala's mother, Teresa; his father was too distraught to attend.

Everyone's attention, it seemed, was directed toward a zoolike cage near the center of the courtroom. It was almost nine feet high and twenty feet long, and had thick metal bars. Standing in the middle of it, wearing a suit and peering out calmly through his spectacles, was Krystian Bala. He faced up to twenty-five years in prison.

A trial is predicated on the idea that truth is obtainable. Yet it is also, as the writer Janet Malcolm has noted, a struggle between "two competing narratives," and "the story that can best withstand the attrition of the rules of evidence is the story that wins." In this case, the prosecution's narrative resembled that of "Amok": Bala, like his alter ego Chris, was a depraved hedonist, who, unbound by any sense of moral compunction, had murdered someone in a fit of jealous rage. The prosecution introduced files from Bala's computer, which Wroblewski and the police had seized during a raid of his parents' house. In one file, which had to be accessed with the password "amok," Bala catalogued, in graphic detail, sexual encounters with more than seventy women. The list included his wife, Stasia; a divorced cousin, who was "older" and "plump"; the mother of a friend, described as "old ass, hard-core action"; and a Russian "whore in an old car." The prosecution also presented e-mails in which Bala sounded unmistakably like Chris, using the same vulgar or arcane words, such as "joy juices" and "Madame Melancholy." In an angry e-mail to Stasia, Bala wrote, "Life is not only screwing, darling"—which echoed Chris's exclamation "Fucking is not the end of the world, Mary." A psychologist testified that "every author puts some part of his personality into his artistic creation," and that Chris and the defendant shared "sadistic" qualities.

During all this, Bala sat in the cage, taking notes on the proceedings or looking curiously out at the crowd. At times, he seemed to call into question the premise that the truth can be discerned. Under Polish law, the defendant can ask questions directly of the witnesses, and Bala eagerly did so, his professorial inquiries often phrased to reveal the Derridean instability of their testimony. When a former girlfriend testified that Bala once went out on her balcony drunk and acted as if he were on the verge of committing suicide, he asked her if her words might have multiple interpretations. "Could we just say that this is a matter of semantics—a misuse of the word 'suicide'?" he said.

But, as the trial wore on and the evidence mounted against him, the postmodernist sounded increasingly like an empiricist, a man desperately looking to show gaps in the prosecution's chain of evidence. Bala noted that no one had seen him kidnap Janiszewski, or kill him, or dump his body. "I'd like to say that I never met Dariusz, and there is not a single witness who would confirm that I did so," Bala said. He complained that the prosecution was taking random incidents in his personal life and weaving them into a story that no longer resembled reality. The prosecutors were constructing a mytho-creation—or, as Bala's defense attorney put it to me, "the plot of a novel." According to the defense, the police and the media had been seduced by the most alluring story rather than by the truth. (Stories about the case had appeared under headlines such as "TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION" and "MURDER, HE WROTE.")

Bala had long subscribed to the postmodernist notion of "the death of the author"—that an author has no more access to the meaning of his literary work than anyone else. Yet, as the prosecution presented to the jury potentially incriminating details from "Amok," Bala complained that his novel was

IT'S NOT ENOUGH THAT I FLY FIRST CLASS... MY FRIENDS MUST ALSO FLY COACH.

being misinterpreted. He insisted that the murder of Mary was simply a symbol of the "destruction of philosophy," and he made one last attempt to assert authorial control. As he later put it to me, "I'm the fucking author! I know what I meant."

In early September, the case went to the jury. Bala never took the stand, but in a statement he said, "I do believe the court will make the right decision and absolve me of all the charges." Wroblewski, who had been promoted to inspector, showed up in court, hoping to hear the verdict. "Even when you're sure of the facts, you wonder if someone else will see them the same way you do," he told me.

At last, the judges and jurors filed back into the courtroom. Bala's mother waited anxiously. She had never read "Amok," which contains a scene of Chris fantasizing about raping his mother. "I started to read the book, but it was too hard," she told me. "If someone else had written the book, maybe I would have read it, but I'm his mother." Bala's father appeared in the courtroom for the first time. He had read the novel, and though he had trouble understanding parts of it, he thought it was an important work of literature. "You can read it ten, twenty times, and each time discover something new in it," he said. On his copy, Bala had written an inscription to both his parents. It said, "Thank you for your . . . forgiveness of all my sins."

As Judge Hojenska read the verdict, Bala stood perfectly straight and still. Then came the one unmistakable word: "Guilty."

The gray cinder-block prison in Wroclaw looks like a relic of the Soviet era. After I slipped my visitor's pass through a tiny hole in the wall, a disembodied voice ordered me to the front of the building, where a solid gate swung open and a guard emerged, blinking in the sunlight. The guard waved me inside as the gate slammed shut behind us. After being searched, I was led through several dank interlocking chambers and into a small visitors' room with dingy wooden tables and chairs. Conditions in Polish prisons are notorious. Because of overcrowding, as many as seven people are often kept in a single cell. In 2004, prison inmates in Wroclaw staged a three-day hunger strike to protest overcrowding, poor food, and insufficient medical care. Violence is also a problem: only a few days before I arrived, I was told, a visitor had been stabbed to death by an inmate.

In the corner of the visitors' room was a slender, handsome man with wire-rimmed glasses and a navy-blue artist's smock over a T-shirt that said "University of Wisconsin." He was holding a book and looked like an American student abroad, and it took me a moment to realize that I was staring at Krystian Bala. "I'm glad you could come," he said as he shook my hand, leading me to one of the tables. "This whole thing is farce, like something out of Kafka." He spoke clear English but with a heavy accent, so that his "s"es sounded like "z"s.

Sitting down, he leaned across the table, and I could see that his cheeks were drawn, he had dark circles around his eyes, and his curly hair was standing up in front, as if he had been anxiously running his fingers through it. "I am being sentenced to prison for twenty-five years for writing a book—a book!" he said. "It is ridiculous. It is bullshit. Excuse my language, but that is what it is. Look, I wrote a novel, a crazy novel. Is the book vulgar? Yes. Is it obscene? Yes. Is it bawdy? Yes. Is it offensive? Yes. I intended it to be. This was a work of provocation." He paused, searching for an example, then added, "I wrote, for instance, that it would be easier for Christ to come out of a woman's womb than for me—" He stopped, catching himself. "I mean, for the narrator to fuck her. You see, this is *supposed* to offend." He went on, "What is happening to me is like what happened to Salman Rushdie."

As he spoke, he placed the book that he was carrying on the table. It was a worn, battered copy of "Amok." When I asked Bala about the evidence against him, such as the cell phone and the calling card, he sounded evasive and, at times, conspiratorial. "The calling card is not mine," he said. "Someone is trying to set me up. I don't know who yet, but someone is out to destroy me." His hand touched mine. "Don't you see what they are doing? They are constructing this reality and forcing me to live inside it."

He said that he had filed an appeal, which cited logical and factual inconsistencies in the trial. For instance, one medical examiner said that Janiszewski had drowned, whereas another insisted that he had died of strangulation. The Judge herself had admitted that she was not sure if Bala had carried out the crime alone or with an accomplice.

When I asked him about "Amok," Bala became animated and gave direct and detailed answers. "The thesis of the

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"Technically, my bachelorhood isn't so much confirmed as it is legislated."

book is not my personal thesis," he said. "I'm not an anti-feminist. I'm not a chauvinist. I'm not heartless. Chris, in many places, is my antihero." Several times, he pointed to my pad and said, "Put this down" or "This is important." As he watched me taking notes, he said, with a hint of awe, "You see how crazy this is? You are here writing a story about a story I made up about a murder that never happened." On virtually every page of his copy of "Amok," he had underlined passages and scribbled notations in the margins. Later, he showed me several scraps of paper on which he had drawn elaborate diagrams revealing his literary influences. It was clear that, in prison, he had become even more consumed by the book. "I sometimes read pages aloud to my cellmates," he said.

One question that was never answered at the trial still hovered over the case: Why would someone commit a murder and then write about it in a novel that would help to get him caught? In "Crime and Punishment," Raskolnikov speculates that even the smartest criminal makes mistakes, because he "experiences at the moment of the crime a sort of failure of will and reason, which . . . are replaced by a phenomenal, childish thoughtlessness, just at the moment when reason and prudence are most necessary." "Amok," however, had been published three years after the murder. If Bala was guilty of murder, the cause was not a "failure of will and reason" but, rather, an excess of both.

"Excuse me, do you have a minute for someone other than yourself, you selfish bastard?"

• •

Some observers wondered if Bala had wanted to get caught, or, at least, to unburden himself. In "Amok," Chris speaks of having a "guilty conscience" and of his desire to remove his "white gloves of silence." Though Bala maintained his innocence, it was possible to read the novel as a kind of confession. Wroblewski and the authorities, who believed that Bala's greatest desire was to attain literary immortality, saw his crime and his writing as indivisible. At the trial, Janiszewski's widow pleaded with the press to stop making Bala out to be an artist rather than a murderer. Since his arrest, "Amok" had become a sensation in Poland, selling out at virtually every bookstore.

"There's going to be a new edition coming out with an afterword about the trial and all the events that have happened," Bala told me excitedly. "Other countries are interested in publishing it as well." Flipping through the pages of his own copy, he added, "There's never been a book quite like this."

As we spoke, he seemed far less interested in the idea of the "perfect crime" than he was in the "perfect story," which, in his definition, pushed past the boundaries of aesthetics and reality and morality charted by his literary forebears. "You know, I'm working on a sequel to 'Amok,' " he said, his eyes lighting up. "It's called 'De Liryk.' " He repeated the words several times. "It's a pun. It means 'lyrics,' as in a story, or 'delirium.' "

He explained that he had started the new book before he was arrested, but that the police had seized his computer, which contained his only copy. (He was trying to get the files back.) The authorities told me that they had found in the computer evidence that Bala was collecting information on Stasia's new boyfriend, Harry. "Single, 34 years old, his mom died when he was 8," Bala had written. "Apparently works at the railway company, probably as a train driver but I'm not sure." Wroblewski and the authorities suspected that Harry might be Bala's next target. After Bala had learned that Harry visited an Internet chat room, he had posted a message at the site, under an assumed name, saying, "Sorry to bother you but I'm looking for Harry. Does anyone know him from Chojnow?"

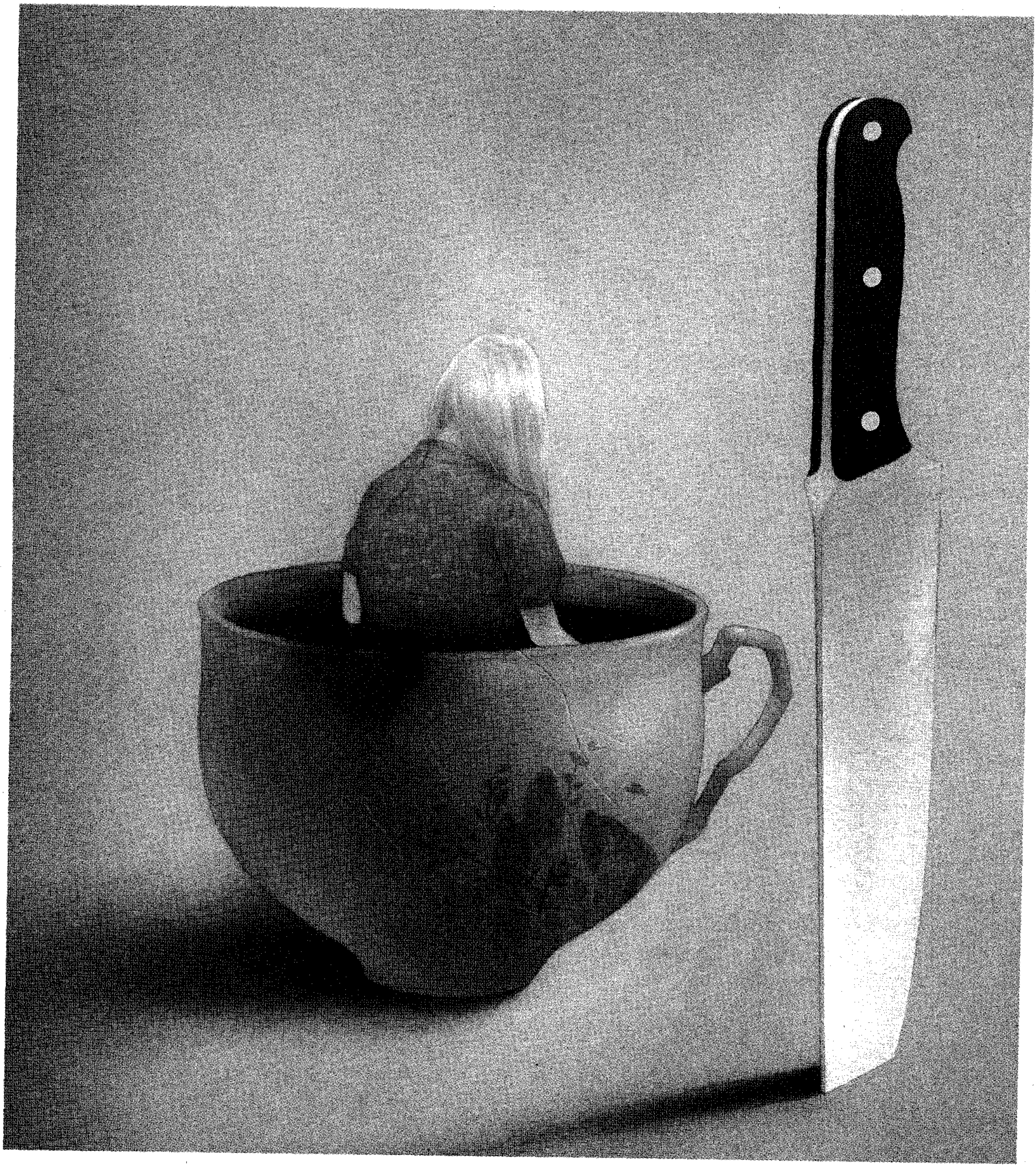
Bala told me that he hoped to complete his second novel after the appeals court made its ruling. In fact, several weeks after we spoke, the court, to the disbelief of many, annulled the original verdict. Although the appeals panel found an "undoubted connection" between Bala and the murder, it concluded that there were still gaps in the "logical chain of evidence," such as the medical examiners' conflicting testimony, which needed to be resolved. The panel refused to release Bala from prison, but ordered a new trial, which is scheduled to begin this spring.

Bala insisted that, no matter what happened, he would finish "De Liryk." He glanced at the guards, as if afraid they might hear him, then leaned forward and whispered, "This book is going to be even more shocking." ♦

FICTION

FREE RADICALS

BY ALICE MUNRO



At first, people kept phoning, to make sure that Nita was not too depressed, not too lonely, not eating too little or drinking too much. (She had been such a diligent wine drinker that many forgot that she was now forbidden to drink at all.) She held them off, without sounding nobly grief-stricken or unnaturally cheerful or absent-minded or confused. She said that she didn’t need groceries; she was working through what she had on hand. She had enough of her prescription pills and enough stamps for her thank-you notes.

Her closer friends probably suspected the truth—that she was not bothering to eat much and that she threw out any sympathy note she happened to get. She had not even informed the people who lived at a distance, to elicit such notes. Not Rich’s ex-wife in Arizona or his semi-estranged brother in Nova Scotia, though those two might have understood, perhaps better than the people near at hand, why she had proceeded with the non-funeral as she had done.

Rich had told her that he was going to the village, to the hardware store. It was around ten o’clock in the morning, and he had just started to paint the railing of the deck. That is, he’d been scraping it to prepare for the painting, and the old scraper had come apart in his hand.

She hadn’t had time to wonder about his being late. He’d died bent over the sidewalk sign that stood in front of the hardware store offering a discount on lawnmowers. He hadn’t even managed to get into the store. He’d been eighty-one years old and in fine health, aside from some deafness in his right ear. His doctor had checked him over only the week before. Nita was to learn that the recent checkup, the clean bill of health, cropped up in a surprising number of the sudden-death stories that she was now presented with. “You’d almost think that such visits ought to be avoided,” she’d said.

She should have spoken like this only to her close and fellow bad-mouthing friends, Virgie and Carol, women around her own age, which was sixty-two. Her younger friends found this sort of talk unseemly and evasive. At first, they had crowded in on Nita. They had not actually spoken of the grieving process, but she had been afraid that at any moment they might start.

SAM WEBER

As soon as she got on with the arrangements, of course, all but the tried and true had fallen away. The cheapest box, into the ground immediately, no ceremony of any kind. The undertaker had suggested that this might be against the law, but she and Rich had had their facts straight. They’d got their information almost a year before, when the diagnosis of her cancer became final.

“How was I to know he’d steal my thunder?” she’d said.

People had not expected a traditional service, but they had looked forward to some kind of contemporary affair. Celebrating the life. Playing his favorite music, holding hands together, telling stories that praised Rich while touching humorously on his quirks and forgivable faults.

The sort of thing that Rich had said made him puke.

So it was dealt with privately, and soon the stir, the widespread warmth that had surrounded Nita melted away, though some people, she supposed, were likely still saying that they were concerned about her. Virgie and Carol didn’t say that. They said only that she was a selfish bloody bitch if she was thinking of conking out now, any sooner than was necessary. They would come around, they said, and revive her with Grey Goose.

She assured them that she wasn’t, though she could see a certain logic to the idea.

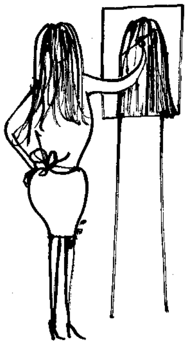
Thanks to the radiation last spring, her cancer was at present in remission—whatever that actually meant. It did not mean gone. Not for good, anyway. Her liver was the main theatre of operations and as long as she stuck to nibbles it did not complain. It would only have depressed her friends to remind them that she couldn’t have wine, let alone vodka.

Rich died in June. Now here it is midsummer. She gets out of bed early and washes herself and dresses in anything that comes to hand. But she does dress and wash, and she brushes her teeth and combs her hair, which has grown back decently, gray around her face and dark at the back, the way it was before. She puts on lipstick and pencils her eyebrows, which are now very scanty, and out of her lifelong respect for a narrow waist and moderate hips she checks on the achievements she has made in that direction, though she knows that the proper word for all parts of her now might be “scrawny.”

She sits in her usual ample armchair, with piles of books and unopened magazines around her. She sips cautiously from the mug of weak herbal tea that is now her substitute for coffee. At one time, she thought that she could not live without coffee, but it turned out that it was really just the large warm mug she wanted in her hands, that was the aid to thought or whatever it was she practiced through the procession of hours, or of days.

This was Rich’s house. He’d bought it when he was with his first wife, Bett. It had been intended as a weekend place, closed up in the winter. Two tiny bedrooms, a lean-to kitchen, half a mile from the village. But soon Rich had begun working on it, learning carpentry, building a wing for two new bedrooms and a bathroom and another wing for his study, turning the original house into an open-plan living room, dining room, kitchen. Bett had become interested; she’d claimed in the beginning not to understand why he’d bought such a dump, but practical improvements always engaged her, and she bought matching carpenter’s aprons. She’d needed something to become involved in, having finished and published the cookbook that had occupied her for several years. They’d had no children.

And at the same time that Bett had been busy telling people that she’d found her role in life as a carpenter’s helper, and that it had brought her and Rich much closer, Rich had been falling in love with Nita. She’d worked in the registrar’s office of the university where he taught medieval literature. The first time they’d made love was amid the shavings and sawn wood of what was to become the house’s central room with its arched ceiling, on a weekend when Bett had stayed in the city. Nita had left her sunglasses behind—not on purpose, though Bett, who never forgot anything, could not believe that. The usual ruckus followed, trite and painful, and ended with Bett going off to California, then Arizona, Nita quitting her job at the suggestion of the registrar, and Rich missing out on becoming dean of arts. He took early retirement, sold the city house. Nita did not inherit the smaller carpenter’s apron, but she read her books cheerfully in the midst of construction and disorder, made rudimentary dinners on a hot plate, and went for long exploratory walks, coming back with ragged bouquets of tiger lilies and wild carrot, which she stuffed into empty paint cans. Later, when she and Rich had settled down, she felt somewhat embarrassed to think how readily she had played the younger woman, the happy home-wrecker, the lissome, laughing, tripping ingénue. She was really a rather serious, physically awkward, self-conscious woman, who could recite not just the kings but the queens of England, and knew the Thirty Years' War backward, but was shy about dancing in front of people and would never learn, as Bett had, to get up on a stepladder.



The house had a row of cedars on one side and a railway embankment on the other. The railway traffic had never amounted to much, and by now there were only a couple of trains a month. Weeds were lavish between the tracks. One time, when she was on the verge of menopause, Nita had teased Rich into making love up there—not on the ties, of course, but on the narrow grass verge beside them—and they had climbed down inordinately pleased with themselves.

She thought carefully, every morning when she first took her seat, of the places where Rich was not. He was not in the smaller bathroom, where his shaving things still were, along with the prescription pills for various troublesome but not serious ailments which he'd refused to throw out. Nor was he in the bedroom, which she had just tidied and left. Not in the larger bathroom, which he had entered only to take tub baths. Or in the kitchen, which had become mostly his domain in the last year. He was of course not out on the half-scraped deck, ready to peer jokingly in the window—through which she might, in earlier days, have pretended to be alarmed at the sight of a peeping tom.

Or in the study. That was where, of all places, his absence had to be most often verified. At first, she had found it necessary to go to the door and open it and stand there, surveying the piles of paper, the moribund computer, the overflowing files, the books lying open or face down, as well as crowded on the shelves. Now she could manage just by picturing these things.

One of these days, she would have to enter the room. She thought of it as invading. She would have to invade her dead husband's mind. This was one possibility that she had never considered. Rich had seemed to her such a tower of efficiency and competence, so vigorous and firm a presence that she had always believed, quite unreasonably, that he would survive her. Then, in the last year, this had become not a foolish belief at all but in both their minds, she thought, a certainty.

She would deal with the cellar first. It really was a cellar, not a basement. Planks made walkways over the dirt floor, and the small high windows were hung with dirty cobwebs. There was nothing down there that she ever needed. Just Rich's half-filled paint tins, boards of various lengths, tools that were either usable or ready to be discarded. She had opened the door and gone down the steps just once since Rich had died, to see that no lights had been left on, and to assure herself that the fuse switches were there, with labels written beside them to tell her which controlled what. When she came up, she had bolted the door as usual, on the kitchen side. Rich used to laugh about that habit of hers, asking what she thought might get in, through the stone walls and elf-size windows, to menace them.

Nevertheless, the cellar would be easier to start on; it would be a hundred times easier than the study.

She did make up the bed and tidy her own little messes in the kitchen or the bathroom, but in general the impulse to take on any wholesale sweep of housecleaning was beyond her. She could barely throw out a twisted paper clip or a fridge magnet that had lost its attraction, let alone the dish of Irish coins that she and Rich had brought home from a trip fifteen years ago. Everything seemed to have acquired its own peculiar heft and strangeness.

Carol or Virgie phoned every day, usually toward suppertime, when they must have thought her solitude was least bearable. She told them that she was O.K.; she would come out of her lair soon. She just needed this time to think and read. And eat and sleep.

It was true, too, except for the part about reading. She sat in her chair surrounded by her books without opening one of them. She had always been such a reader—that was one reason, Rich had said, that she was the right woman for him; she could sit and read and let him alone—but now she couldn't stick to it for even half a page.

She hadn't been just a once-through reader, either. "The Brothers Karamazov," "The Mill on the Floss," "The Wings of the Dove," "The Magic Mountain," over and over. She would pick one up, planning to read that one special passage, and find herself unable to stop until the whole thing was redigested. She read modern fiction, too. Always fiction. She hated to hear the word "escape" used about fiction. She once might have argued, not just playfully, that it was real life that was the escape. But real life had become too important to argue about.

And now, most strangely, all that was gone. Not just with Rich's death but with her own immersion in illness. She had thought that the change was temporary and the magic of reading would reappear once she was off certain drugs and exhausting treatments.

But apparently not.

Sometimes she tried to explain why, to an imaginary inquisitor.

"I got too busy."

"So everybody says. Doing what?"

"Too busy paying attention."

"To what?"

"I mean thinking."

"What about?"

"Never mind."

One morning, after sitting for a while, she decided that it was a very hot day. She should get up and turn on the fans. Or she could, with more environmental responsibility, try opening the front and back doors and letting the breeze, if there was any, blow through the house.

She unlocked the front door first. And even before she had allowed half an inch of morning light to show itself she was aware of a dark stripe cutting that light off.

There was a young man standing outside the screen door, which was hooked.

"Didn't mean to startle you," he said. "I was looking for a doorbell or something.

I gave a little knock on the frame here, but I guess you didn't hear me."

"Sorry," she said.

"I'm supposed to look at your fuse box. If you could tell me where it is."

She stepped aside to let him in. She took a moment to remember.

"Yes. In the cellar," she said. "I'll turn the light on. You'll see it."

He shut the door behind him and bent to take off his shoes.

"That's all right," she said. "It's not as if it's raining."

"Might as well, though. I make it a habit. Could leave you dust tracks insteada mud."

She went into the kitchen, not able to sit down again until he left the house.

She opened the cellar door for him as he came up the steps.

"O.K.?" she said. "You found it O.K.?"

"Fine."

She was leading him toward the front door, then realized that there were no footsteps behind her. She turned and saw him still standing in the kitchen.

"You don't happen to have anything you could fix up for me to eat, do you?"

There was a change in his voice—a crack in it, a rising pitch that made her think of a television comedian doing a rural whine. Under the kitchen skylight, she saw that he wasn't as young as she'd thought. When she'd opened the door, she had been aware only of a skinny body, the face dark against the morning glare. The body, as she saw it now, was certainly skinny but more wasted than boyish, affecting a genial slouch. His face was long and rubbery, with prominent light-blue eyes. A jokey look, but a persistence, too, as if he generally got his way.

"See, I happen to be a diabetic," he said. "I don't know if you know any diabetics, but the fact is when you get hungry you got to eat. Otherwise your system goes all weird. I shoulda ate before I came in here, but I let myself get in a hurry. You mind if I sit down?"

He was already sitting down at the kitchen table.

"You got any coffee?"

"I have tea. Herbal tea, if you'd like that."

"Sure. Sure."

She measured tea into a strainer, plugged in the kettle, and opened the refrigerator.

"I don't have much on hand," she said. "I have some eggs. Sometimes I scramble an egg and put ketchup on it. Would you like that? I have some English muffins I could toast."

"English, Irish, Yukoranian, I don't care."

She cracked a couple of eggs into the pan, broke up the yolks, and stirred them with a cooking fork, then sliced a muffin and put it into the toaster. She got a plate from the cupboard, set it down in front of him. Then a knife and fork from the cutlery drawer.

"Pretty plate," he said, holding it up as if to see his face in it. Just as she turned her attention back to the eggs she heard it smash on the floor.

"Oh, mercy me," he said in a new voice, a squeaky and definitely nasty voice. "Look what I gone and done."

"It's all right," she said, knowing now that nothing was.

"Musta slipped through my fingers."

She got down another plate, set it on the counter until she was ready to put the toasted muffin halves and the eggs smeared with ketchup on top of it.

He had stooped down, meanwhile, to gather up the pieces of broken china. He held up one piece that had broken so that it had a sharp point to it. As she set his meal down on the table, he scraped the point lightly down his bare forearm. Tiny beads of blood appeared, at first separate, then joining to form a string.

"It's O.K.," he said. "It's just a joke. I know how to do it for a joke. If I'd've wanted to be serious, we wouldn't've needed no ketchup, eh?"

There were still some pieces on the floor that he had missed. She turned away, thinking to get the broom, which was in a closet near the back door. He caught her arm in a flash.

"You sit down. You sit right here while I'm eating," he said. He lifted the bloodied arm to show it to her again. Then he made a sandwich out of the muffin and the eggs and ate it in a very few bites. He chewed with his mouth open. The kettle was boiling.

"Tea bag in the cup?" he said.

"Yes. It's loose tea, actually."

"Don't you move. I don't want you near that kettle, do I?"

He poured boiling water through the strainer into the cup.

"Looks like hay. Is that all you got?"

"I'm sorry. Yes."

"Don't go on saying you're sorry. If it's all you got, it's all you got. You never did think I come here to look at the fuse box, did you?"

"Well, yes," Nita said. "I did."

"You don't now. You scared?"

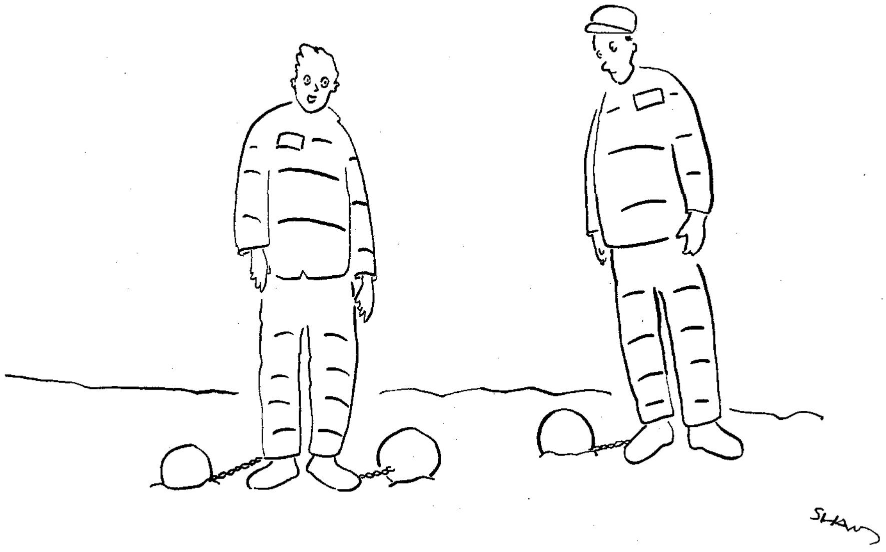
She chose to consider this not as a taunt but as a serious question.

"I don't know. I'm more startled than scared, I guess. I don't know."

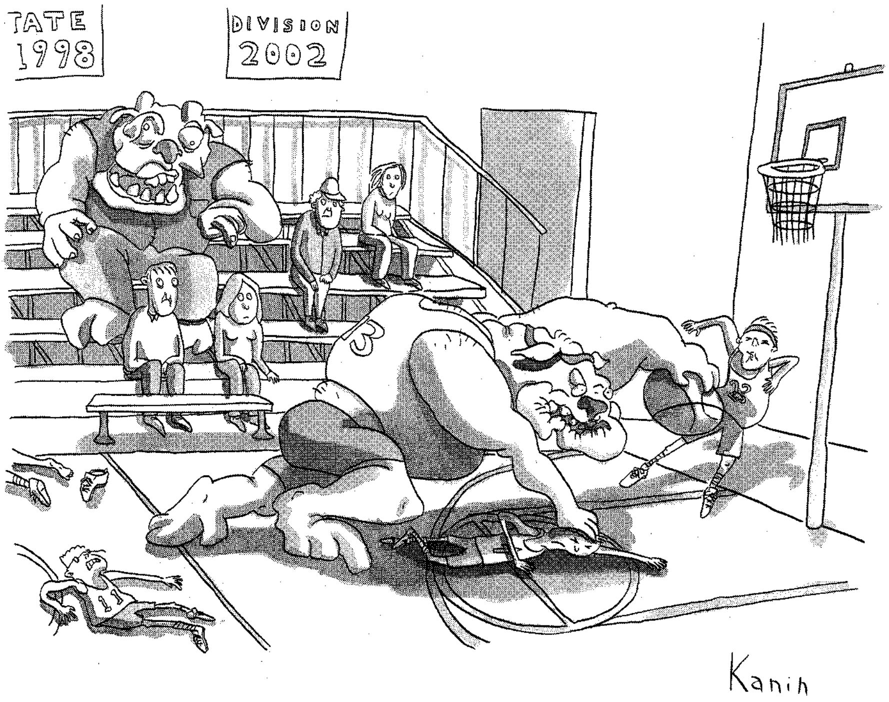
"One thing. One thing you don't need to be scared of. I'm not going to rape you."

"I hardly thought so."

"You can't never be too sure." He took a sip of the tea and made a face. "Just because you're an old lady. There's all kinds out there—they'll do it to anything. Babies or dogs and cats or old ladies. Old men. They're not fussy. Well, I am. I'm



"On the bright side, I've really taken inches off my buns and thighs."



"That's my son."

not interested in getting it any way but normal and with some nice lady I like and what likes me. So rest assured."

Nita said, "Thank you for telling me."

He shrugged, but seemed pleased with himself.

"That your car out front?"

"My husband's car."

"Husband? Where's he?"

"He's dead. I don't drive. I meant to sell it, but I haven't yet."

What a fool, what a fool she was to tell him that.

"2004?"

"I think so. Yes."

"For a second I thought you were going to try and trick me with the husband stuff. Wouldn't've worked, though. I can smell it if a woman's on her own. I know it the minute I walk in a house. Minute she opens the door. Instinct. So it runs O.K.? You know the last time he drove it?"

"The seventeenth of June. The day he died."

"Got any gas in it?"

"I would think so."

"Nice if he filled it up right before. You got the keys?"

"Not on me. I know where they are."

"O.K." He pushed his chair back, hitting one of the pieces of china. He stood up, shook his head in some kind of surprise, sat down again.

"I'm wiped. Gotta sit a minute. I thought it'd be better when I'd ate. I was just making that up about being a diabetic."

She shifted in her chair and he jumped.

"You stay where you are. I'm not that wiped I couldn't grab you. It's just that I walked all night."

"I was only going to get the keys."

"You wait till I say. I walked the railway track. Never seen a train. I walked all the way to here and never seen a train."

"There's hardly ever a train."

"Yeah. Good. I went down in the ditch going around some of them half-assed little towns. Then it come daylight and I was still O.K., except where it crossed the road and I took a run for it. Then I looked down here and seen the house and the car, and I said to myself, 'That's it.' I coulda took my old man's car, but I got some brains left in my head."

She knew that he wanted her to ask what he had done. She was also sure that the less she knew the better it would be for her.

Then, for the first time since he had entered the house, she thought of her cancer. She thought of how it freed her, put her out of danger.

"What are you smiling about?"

"I don't know. Was I smiling?"

"I guess you like listening to stories. Want me to tell you a story?"

"I'd rather you'd leave."

"I will leave. First, I'll tell you a story."

He put his hand in a back pocket. "Here. Want to see a picture? Here."

It was a photograph of three people, taken in a living room with closed floral curtains as a backdrop. An old man—not really old, maybe in his sixties—and a woman of about the same age were sitting on a couch. A very large younger woman was sitting in a wheelchair drawn up close to one end of the couch and a little in front of it. The old man was heavy and gray-haired, with eyes narrowed and mouth slightly open, as if he were asthmatic, but he was smiling as well as he could. The old woman was much smaller, with dyed brown hair and lipstick. She was wearing what used to be called a peasant blouse, with little red bows at the wrists and neck. She smiled determinedly, even a bit frantically, her lips stretched over perhaps bad teeth.

But it was the younger woman who monopolized the picture. Distinct and monstrous in a bright muumuu, her dark hair done up in a row of little curls along her forehead, cheeks sloping into her neck. And, in spite of all that bulge of flesh, an expression of some satisfaction and cunning.

"That's my mother and that's my dad. And that's my sister, Madelaine. In the wheelchair. She was born funny. Nothing no doctor or anybody could do for her. And ate like a pig. There was bad blood between her and me since ever I remember. She was five years older than me and she just set out to torment me. Throwing anything at me she could get her hands on and knocking me down and trying to run over me with her fuckin' wheelchair. Pardon my French."

"It must have been hard for you. And for your parents."

"Huh. They just rolled over and took it. They went to this church, see, and this preacher told them she was a gift from God. They took her with them to church and she'd fuckin' howl like a fuckin' cat in the back yard and they'd say, 'Oh, she's tryin' to make music, oh, God fuckin' bless her.' Excuse me again.

"So I never bothered much with sticking around home, you know. I went and got my own life. That's all right, I says, I'm not hanging around for this crap. I got my own life. I got work. I nearly always got work. I never sat around on my ass drunk on government money. On my rear end, I mean. I never asked my old man for a penny. I'd get up and tar a roof in the ninety-degree heat, or I'd mop the floors in some stinkin' old restaurant or go grease-monkey for some rotten cheatin' garage. I'd do it. But I wasn't always up for taking their shit, so I wasn't lasting too long. That shit that people are always handing people like me, and I couldn't take it. I come from a decent home. My dad worked till he got too sick—he worked on the buses. I wasn't brought up to take shit. O.K., though—never mind that. What my parents always told me was 'The house is yours. The house is all paid up and it's in good shape and it's yours.' That's what they told me. 'We know you had a hard time here when you were young, and if you hadn't had such a hard time you coulda got an education, so we want to make it up to you how we can.' Then not long ago I'm talking to my dad on the phone and he says, 'Of course, you understand the deal.' So I'm, 'What deal?' He says, 'It's only a deal if you sign the papers that you will take care of your sister as long as she lives. It's only your home if it's her home, too,' he says.

"Jesus. I never heard that before. I never heard that was the deal before. I always thought the deal was that when they died she'd go into a home. And it wasn't going to be my home.

"So I told my old man that wasn't the way I understood it, and he says, 'It's all sewed up for you to sign, and if you don't want to sign it you don't have to. If you do sign it, your Aunt Rennie will be around to keep an eye on you, so when we're gone you see you stick to the arrangements.' Yeah, my Aunt Rennie. She's my mom's youngest sister and she is one prize bitch. Anyway, he says, 'Your Aunt Rennie will be keeping an eye on you,' and suddenly I just switched. I said, 'Well, I guess that's the way it is and I guess it is only fair. O.K. O.K. Is it all right if I come over and eat dinner with you this Sunday?' 'Sure,' he says. 'Glad you have come to look at it the right way. You always fire off too quick,' he says. 'At your age you ought to have some sense.' 'Funny you should say that,' I says to myself.

"So over I go, and Mom has cooked chicken. Nice smell when I first go into the house. Then I get the smell of Madelaine, just her same old awful smell. I don't know what it is, but even if Mom washes her every day it's there. But I acted very nice. I said, 'This is an occasion. I should take a picture.' I told them I had this wonderful new camera that developed right away and they could see the picture. 'Right off the bat, you can see yourself—what do you think of that?' And I got them all sitting in the front room just the way I showed you. Mom, she says, 'Hurry up. I have to get back in my kitchen.' 'Do it in no time,' I says. So I take their picture and she says, 'Come on, now, let's see how we look,' and I say, 'Hang on, just be patient, it'll only take a minute.' And while they're waiting to see how they look I take out my nice little gun and *bin-bang-barn* I shoot the works of them.

"Then I took another picture and I went out to the kitchen and ate up some of the chicken and didn't look at them no more. I kind of had expected Aunt Rennie to be there, but Mom said she had some church thing. I would've shot her, too, just as easy.

"So lookie here. Before and after."

The man's head had fallen sideways, the woman's backward. Their expressions were blown away. The sister had fallen forward, so there was no face to be seen, just her great flowery swathed knees and dark hair with its elaborate and outdated coiffure.

"I coulda just sat there feelin' good for a week. I felt so relaxed. But I didn't stay past dark. I made sure I was all cleaned up and I finished off the chicken and I knew I better get out. I was prepared for Aunt Rennie walkin' in, but I got out of the mood I'd been in and I knew I'd have to work myself up to do her. I just didn't feel like it no more. One thing, my stomach was so full. It was a big chicken, and I ate it all instead of packin' it with me, because I was scared the dogs would smell it and cut up a fuss when I went by the back lanes like I figured to do. I thought that chicken inside of me would do me for a week. Yet look how hungry I was when I got to you."

He glanced around the kitchen. "I don't suppose you got anything to drink here, do you? That tea was awful."

"There might be some wine," she said. "I don't know—I don't drink anymore."

"You A.A.?"

"No. It just doesn't agree with me."

She got up and found that her legs were shaking. Of course.

"I fixed up the phone line before I come in here," he said. "Just thought you ought to know."

Would he get careless and more easygoing as he drank, or meaner and wilder? How could she tell? She found the wine without having to leave the kitchen. She and Rich used to drink red wine every day in reasonable quantities because it was supposed to be good for your heart. Or bad for something that was not good for your heart. In her fright and confusion, she was not able to think what that was called.

Because she *was* frightened. Certainly. Her cancer was not going to be any help to her at the present moment, none at all. The fact that she was going to die within a year refused to cancel out the fact that she might die now.

He said, "Hey, this is the good stuff. No screwtop. Haven't you got no corkscrew?"

She moved toward a drawer, but he jumped up and put her aside, not too roughly.

"Uh-uh, I get it. You stay away from this drawer. Oh my, lots of good stuff in here."

He put the knives on the seat of his chair, where she would never be able to grab them, and used the corkscrew. She did not fail to see what a wicked instrument it could be in his hands, but there was not the least possibility that she herself would ever be able to use it.

"I'm just getting up for glasses," she said, but he said no.

"No glass," he said. "You got any plastic?"

"No."

"Cups, then. I can see you."

She set down two cups and said, "Just a very little for me."

"And me," he said, businesslike. "I gotta drive." But he filled his cup to the brim. "I don't want no cop stickin' his head in to see how I am."

"Free radicals," she said.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It's something about red wine. It either destroys them because they're bad or builds them up because they’re good—I can’t remember.”

She drank a sip of the wine and it didn’t make her feel sick, as she had expected. He drank, still standing. She said, “Watch for those knives when you sit down.”

“Don’t start kidding with me.”

He gathered the knives and put them back in the drawer and sat.

“You think I’m dumb? You think I’m nervous?”

She took a big chance. She said, “I just think you haven’t ever done anything like this before.”

“Course I haven’t. You think I’m a murderer? Yeah, I killed them, but I’m not a murderer.”

“There’s a difference,” she said.

“You bet.”

“I know what it’s like. I know what it’s like to get rid of somebody who has injured you.”

“Yeah?”

“I have done the same thing you did.”

“You never.” He pushed back his chair but did not stand.

“Don’t believe me if you don’t want to,” she said. “But I did it.”

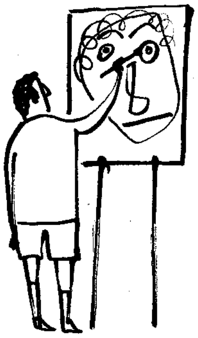
“Hell, you did. How’d you do it, then?”

“Poison.”

“What are you talkin’ about? You make them drink some of that fuckin’ tea or what?”

“It wasn’t a *them*—it was a *her*. There’s nothing wrong with the tea. It’s supposed to prolong your life.”

“Don’t want my life prolonged if it means drinkin’ junk like that. They can find out poison in a body when it’s dead, anyway.”



“I’m not sure that’s true of vegetable poisons. Anyway, nobody would have thought to look. She was one of those girls who had rheumatic fever as a child and coasted along on it, couldn’t play sports or do anything much, always having to sit down and have a rest. Her dying was not any big surprise.”

“What she ever done to you?”

“She was the girl my husband was in love with. He was going to leave me and marry her. He had told me. I’d done everything for him. He and I were working on this house together. He was everything I had. We hadn’t had any children, because he didn’t want them. I learned carpentry and I was frightened to get up on ladders, but I did it. He was my whole life. And he was going to kick me out for this useless whiner who worked in the registrar’s office. Everything we’d worked for was going to go to her. Was that fair?”

“How would a person get poison?”

“I didn’t have to get it. It was right in the back garden. Here. There was a rhubarb patch from years back. There’s a perfectly adequate poison in the veins of rhubarb leaves. Not the stalks—the stalks are what we eat, they’re fine—but the thin little red veins in the big rhubarb leaves, they’re poisonous. I knew about this, but I didn’t know exactly how much it would take to be effective, so what I did was more in the nature of an experiment. Various things were lucky for me. First, my husband was away at a symposium in Minneapolis. He might have taken her along, of course, but it was summer holidays and she had to keep the office going. Another thing, though—she might not have been absolutely on her own. There might have been another person around. And she might have been suspicious of me. I had to assume that she didn’t know I knew. She had come to dinner at my house; we were friendly. I had to count on my husband’s being the kind of person who puts everything off, who would tell me to see how I took it but not yet tell her that he had done so. So then you say, Why get rid of her? He might still have been thinking of staying with me? No. And he would have kept her on somehow. And even if he didn’t our life had been poisoned by her. She’d poisoned my life, so I had to poison hers.

“I baked two tarts. One had the poison in it and one didn’t. I drove down to the university and got two cups of coffee and went to her office. There was nobody there but her. I told her I’d had to come into town, and as I was passing the campus I’d seen this nice little bakery that my husband was always talking about, so I dropped in and bought a couple of tarts and two cups of coffee. I’d been thinking of her all alone when the rest of them got to go on their holidays, and of me all alone with my husband in Minneapolis. She was sweet and grateful. She said that it was very boring for her at the office, and the cafeteria was closed, so she had to go over to the science building for coffee and they put hydrochloric acid in it. Ha-ha. So we had our little party.”

“I hate rhubarb,” he said. “It wouldn’t have worked with me.”

“It did with her. I had to take a chance that it would work fast, before she realized what was wrong and had her stomach pumped. But not so fast that she would associate it with me. I had to be out of the way and so I was. The building was deserted, and as far as I know to this day nobody saw me arrive or leave. Of course, I knew some back ways.”

“You think you’re smart. You got away scot-free.”

“But so have you.”

“What I done wasn’t so underhanded as what you done.”

“It was necessary to you.”

“You bet it was.”

“Mine was necessary to me. I kept my marriage. He came to see that she wouldn’t have been good for him, anyway. She’d have got sick on him, almost certainly. She was just the type. She’d have been nothing but a burden to him. He saw that.”

“You better not have put nothing in them eggs,” he said. “You did, you’ll be sorry.”

“Of course I didn’t. It’s not something you’d go around doing regularly. I don’t actually know anything about poison. It was just by chance that I had that one little piece of information.”

He stood up so suddenly that he knocked over his chair. She noticed that there was not much wine left in the bottle.

“I need the keys to the car.”

She couldn’t think for a moment.

“Keys to the car. Where’d you put them?”

It could happen. As soon as she gave him the keys, it could happen. Would it help to tell him that she was dying of cancer? How stupid. It wouldn’t help at all. Death in the future would not keep her from talking today.

“Nobody knows what I’ve told you,” she said. “You are the only person I’ve told.”

A fat lot of good that might do. The whole advantage she had presented to him had probably gone right over his head.

"Nobody knows *yet*," he said, and she thought, Thank God. He's on the right track. He does realize. Does he realize?

Thank God, maybe.

"The keys are in the blue teapot."

"Where? What the fuck blue teapot?"

"At the end of the counter—the lid got broken, so we used it to just throw things in—"

"Shut up. Shut up or I'll shut you up for good." He tried to stick his fist in the blue teapot, but it would not go in. "Fuck, fuck, fuck!" he cried, and he turned the teapot over and banged it on the counter, so that not only did the car keys and house keys and various coins and a wad of old Canadian Tire money fall out on the floor but pieces of blue pottery hit the boards.

"With the red string on them," she said faintly.

He kicked things about for a moment before he picked up the proper keys.

"So what are you going to say about the car?" he said. "You sold it to a stranger. Right?"

The import of this did not come to her for a moment. When it did, the room quivered. *Going to say.* "Thank you," she said, but her mouth was so dry that she was not sure any sound came out.

It must have, though, for he said, "Don't thank me yet. I got a good memory. Good long memory. You make that stranger look nothin' like me. You don't want them goin' into graveyards diggin' up dead bodies. You just remember, a word outta you and there'll be a word outta me."

She kept looking down. Not stirring or speaking, just looking at the mess on the floor.

Gone. The door closed. Still she didn't move. She wanted to lock the door, but she couldn't move. She heard the engine start, then die. What now? He was so jumpy, he'd do everything wrong. Then again, starting, starting, turning over. The tires on the gravel. She walked trembling to the phone and found that he had told the truth: it was dead.

Beside the phone was one of their many bookcases. This one held mostly old books, books that had not been opened for years. There was "The Proud Tower." Albert Speer. Rich's books.

"A Celebration of Familiar Fruits and Vegetables." "Hearty and Elegant Dishes and Fresh Surprises," assembled, tested, and created by Bett Underhill.

Once Rich had got the kitchen finished, Nita had made the mistake for a while of trying to cook like Bett. For a rather short while, because it turned out that Rich hadn't wanted to be reminded of all that fuss, and she herself hadn't had enough patience for so much chopping and simmering. But she had learned a few things that surprised her. Such as the poisonous aspects of certain familiar and generally benign plants.

She should write to Bett.

Dear Bett, Rich is dead and I have saved my life by becoming you.

But what would Bett care that her life had been saved? There was only one person really worth telling.

Rich. Rich. Now she knew what it was to miss him. Like having the air sucked out of the sky.

She told herself that she could walk down to the village. There was a police office in the back of the Township Hall.

She should get a cell phone.

But she was so shaken, so deeply tired that she could hardly stir a foot. She had first of all to rest.

She was wakened by a knock on her still unlocked door. It was a policeman, not the one from the village but one of the provincial traffic police. He asked if she knew where her car was.

She looked at the patch of gravel where it had been parked.

"It's gone," she said. "It was over there."

"You didn't know it was stolen? When did you last look out and see it?"

"It must have been last night."

"The keys were left in it?"

"I suppose they must have been."

"I have to tell you it's been in a bad accident. A one-car accident just this side of Wallenstein. The driver rolled it down into the culvert and totalled it. And that's not all. He's wanted for a triple murder. That's the latest we heard, anyway. Murder in Mitchellston. You were lucky you didn't run into him."

"Was he hurt?"

"Killed. Instantly. Serves him right."

There followed a kindly stern lecture. Leaving keys in the car. Woman living alone. These days you never know.

Never know. ◆

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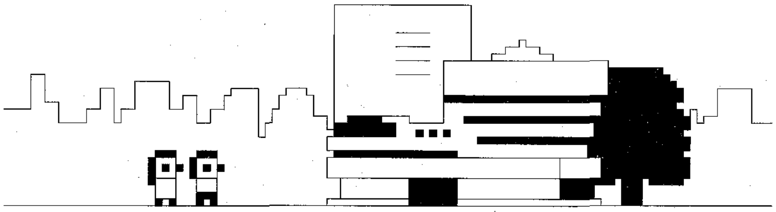


TIBOR KÁRPÁTI

POP MUSIC

LIVING PAINS

Mary J. Blige's chronic brilliance.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Mary J. Blige's eighth studio album, "Growing Pains," defies the conventional wisdom that aging works against female entertainers. Blige has a robust, dark voice, and she moves around melodies in a pleasingly unruly way. She can irrigate a song with pain but is judicious about adding flourishes to her performances—a decision that makes her sound more like a sixties soul singer than like a modern R. & B. star. (Her 1998 live album, "The Tour," documents how comfortable Blige is with a few flat notes, and how little they matter to the fans who track her life as if it were more important than their own.) Her commercial rival and aesthetic antipode is Mariah Carey, another R. & B. singer who is selling remarkably well deep into her career. Carey, who is the more successful, offers the inhuman power of her voice, a knack for producing hit records, and undying optimism. If Carey is "Good Morning America"—all cheer and reliability—Blige is what comes later: the daytime talk show noisy with recrimination and redemption.

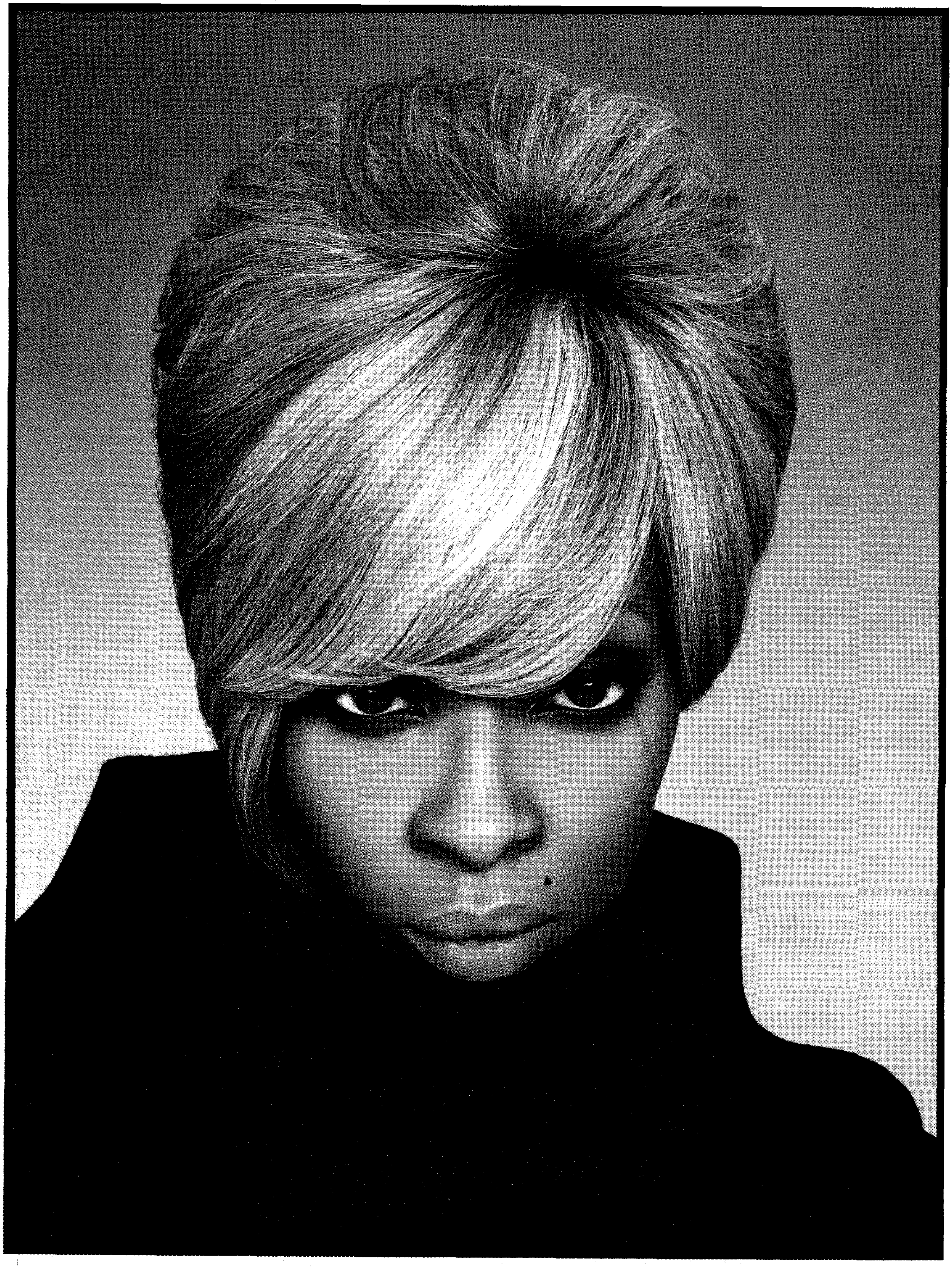
Blige's songs focus on surviving heartache and emerging emboldened. "Growing Pains" is at least her fourth album in a row to be accompanied by a round of interviews that find her vaunting a newfound sense of self and some measure of hard-earned happiness. (In a recent interview with *Vibe*, she posited that if you're human "you're already crazy," which is a reassuring departure from earlier bromides.) The danger, of course, is that true happiness might be her kryptonite.

Blige grew up in Yonkers, in a housing project known as Slow Bomb, and she has talked of being abused as a child and in romantic relationships. Her 1994 hit "Be Happy" began the narrative of chronic misery. "All I really want is to be happy," the chorus goes. In 1997, we got "I Can Love You" (not a done deal) and "Not Gon' Cry," a gospelly confirmation that crying was, at least for a while, Blige's default activity. In 1999, with the album "Mary," the mood began to brighten, though she kept rehanging the backdrop of suffering: "No Happy Holidays," "The Love I Never Had." Two years later, "Family Affair," a breezy song produced by Dr. Dre, asked listeners to put aside "hateration" and get it "perculating," and Blige experienced her first No. 1 single. (So much for misery.) The ensuing album, "No More Drama," also included "Where I've Been," the most specific iteration of Blige's life story to date, even explaining (maybe) the facial scar visible on the cover of "Mary": "I grew up as a seventies baby, brought up in poverty and sin. . . . At the age of seven years old, a strange thing happened to me. Before I even saw, my life had flashed before me, and I've got the mark to show." No phrase seems to recur more in Blige's lyrics than "my life"—her second album is titled "My Life," and even though the first single from "Growing Pains" is called "Just Fine," the words "my life" pop up nineteen times. At this point, it is clear that "my life" is not a boast but a lamentation.

Before Blige developed the profile of a survivor, she was notable for being one of the first R. & B. singers to be at ease working with m.c.s. In the early nineties, she worked repeatedly with Sean (Puffy) Combs, who acted as her A. & R. representative at Blige's first label, Uptown Records. One of her earliest hits and best-known appearances is a duet she performed with the Wu-Tang Clan's Method Man in 1995, "I'll Be There for You/You're All I Need to Get By." Method Man raps about finding the love of his life, and living "in a fat-ass crib with thousands of kids." Blige sings, in an uncharacteristically airy and soft way, the chorus of the 1968 hit by Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell, "You're All I Need to Get By." In the background, though, she throws in subtle ad-libs, as if singing along to the radio. Blige's personality seemed to be a link with hip-hop artists. In a video for the duet with Method Man, Blige is pictured on the roof of an apartment building, sitting against a low wall and bobbing her head, eyes covered by a hat pulled down. She doesn't look like a melodic singer who's been brought in to sweeten the record for a wider audience; on her own terms, she seems just as rugged and menacing as Method Man. In fact, she looks like the one you'd need to tread more lightly around.

Which was true, at least for a while. She was given to drunkenness and drug use during her early years, missing interviews and occasionally lashing out physically at members of the press. Around 2001, the idea of Mary Reborn—usually attributed to Blige's newfound relationship with the producer Kendu Isaacs (her future husband), or with God, or with both—started to circulate. Self-help slogans became the order of the day, mitigated by her idiosyncrasies and a tendency to refer to herself in the third person. ("I have saliva in my mouth like you," Blige told an interviewer in 2003. "I deal with insecurities like you. Mary doesn't mind getting ugly.")

"Growing Pains" has roughly two moods. The first catches Blige in attack mode—sometimes exuberant, sometimes hurt, and, at one point, momentarily angry enough to put her foot through some-



Blige hasn't become more genteel as a singer. If anything, she's more blunt, more visceral. Photograph by Ruven Afanador.

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thing. The second mood is the less poetic. If the song is about how we're all works in progress, it's called "Work in Progress." If the song is about the nature of love, it's called "What Love Is," and the accompanying words often sound like a transcription of Blige thinking out loud: thoughts that she transforms into lyrics simply by singing them—"Let 'em get mad, they gonna hate anyway. Don't you get that? Doesn't matter if you're going on with their plan, they'll never be happy 'cause they're not happy with themselves." Although she writes many of her own lyrics, her gift lies less in the words and more in how fully she absorbs and embodies the words as she sings them. (Her fire bombing of U2's "One," included on the 2005 album "The Breakthrough," makes me wish for an entire album of cover versions, like the two we've already had from Cat Power, who has cited Blige as an inspiration.) Lines that would sound banal from most singers sound urgent and feel immediate, as if Mary were leaving you an especially long voice-mail message—one that she might not even remember the next day. That's why Blige's fans feel exceptionally proprietary about her: self-consciousness is absent from even her most wound-up performances. Blige has no truck with artifice; many of her recordings sound like single takes, where she simply lets go and forgets what she's doing. Of her 2002 performance at the Grammys, where she vanquished her demons in a gold lamé jacket and pants, stomping (and, at one point, squatting) her way through a rendition of "No More Drama," she said, "It may have looked like I was there, but I wasn't. . . . I was, like, 'Who is that?' "

Blige may have gone to charm school (on her old label's dime) and started showing up for interviews, but she hasn't become any more genteel as a singer; if anything, she's more blunt, more visceral. "Grown Woman" is one of her best collaborations with a rapper—Ludacris—and easily one of her most obstreperous, even though the song's theme is simply the fact that Blige is an adult. The producer Dejoin Madison provides a beat that sounds like the eighties rap Blige would have heard back in Yonkers: slow, clomping, and full of unidentified samples. Blige hollers and declaims the song, creating in some verses an entertaining dissonance between lyrics and delivery. Her voltage may seem excessive when it's professing her love for Michael Kors and Yves Saint-Laurent, but, when she pushes back any gawkers with the line "You can't see what's under there, 'cause I'm a grown woman," she sounds appropriately immovable. Ludacris does exactly what he's made his career doing—talking about sex and playing the fool: "Mommy stylish, she knows how to accessorize, and we some StairMasters—I make her get her exercise." The first single, "Just Fine," is as close to light as Blige gets—a fleet dance-floor track that manages to combine the sound of a seventies Stevie Wonder record with the current taste for bright digital keyboards. Happy Mary, though, still sounds a little defensive. "I won't change my life, my life's just fine," the chorus runs, and then extends—probably electronically—as the word "fine" keeps repeating.

Does she protest too much? "Roses" would lead you to believe that, yeah, maybe. This song, in fact, might be the only one of Blige's that sounds just like all her various magazine profiles combined. She is the survivor here, and also, simultaneously, the terror, the wise and heedless one. The fabulous, careful beat balances a glinting series of keyboard puffs against what sounds like a gun cocking. In the verse, she sings in the easy range of her voice, at about half power, confessing that she once "couldn't tell my ups from downs." The chorus is the hard-earned-wisdom bit, her "new definition of love," which she tears out, word by word, with almost all her power: "It ain't all roses, hey, flowers and posing, hey, it ain't all candy, hey, this love stuff is demanding." During the song, her spoken ad-libs become increasingly (and brilliantly) ticked-off. She begins by announcing, "I'm really, really sick and tired of you stepping into my little box when I just don't want to be bothered, O.K.?" (Hard to imagine who would dare step at that point, but we know that someone has.) By the end of the song, she is yelling, lost in R. & B. road rage, upbraiding anyone who would dare tell Mary to seek help: "You go figure it out! You suck it up!" And then, atypically, she laughs, and it seems clear that she is laughing both at herself and about the time it's taken to acquire that skill. ♦

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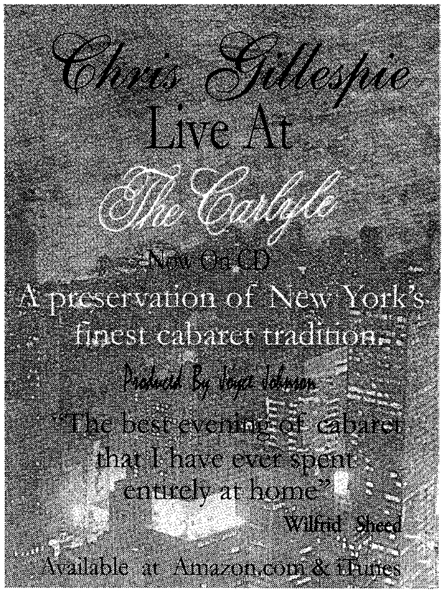
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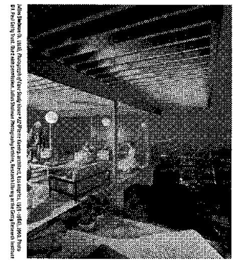
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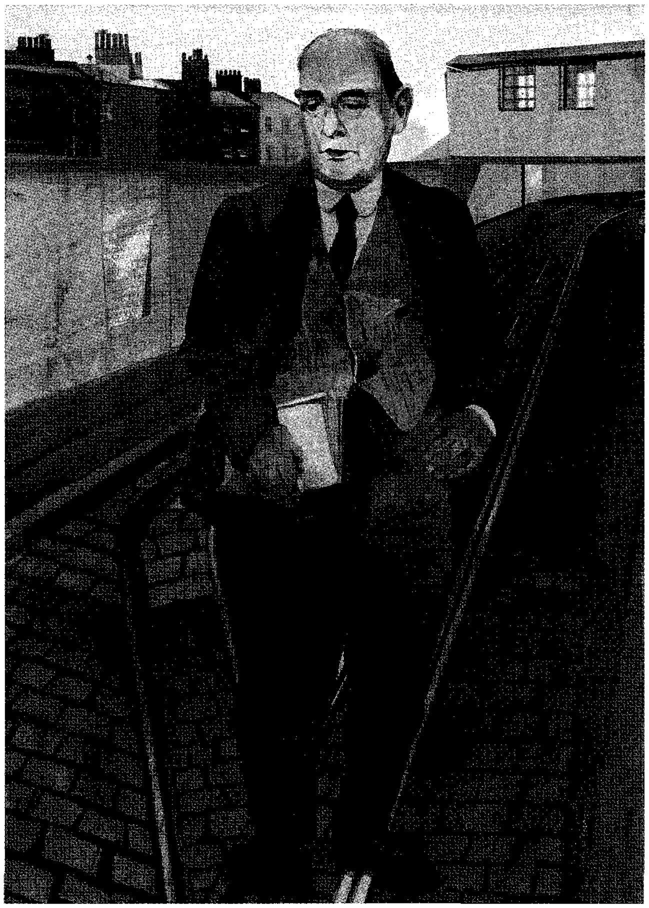
BOOKS

BACK-CHAT, FUNNY CRACKS

The novels of Flann O'Brien.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Begob, and the truth would not be played false were a frank man to say that Flann O'Brien, born Brian O'Nolan in Strabane, Ulster, in 1911, and known as Myles na gCopaleen to the readers of his long-standing column "Cruiskeen Lawn" in the *Irish Times*, when acting as a novelist proffered a mixed bag of blessings and their opposite. Such a pained reflection has been given rise to by a thorough if at intervals dozy reading of "The Complete Novels" by the above-named, as published by Everyman's Library in its fine format, not less than eight hundred pages (counting the front matter) of wee Bembo type bound in glorious red covers with a sewn-in bookmark of golden fabric ($25). On the jacket the author is obscured by his dark hat and his black-rimmed glasses and his own hand at his mouth, and, to be sure, Flann/Brian/Myles, where many an author not only rejoices in his face on his jacket but sets his personal facts in the forefront of his prose, engaged in a significant effort of self-concealment, of pseudonymity lurking behind a prose greatly melodious and garrulous in its confident manner. The front flap of the same jacket states him to be "along with Joyce and Beckett . . . part of the holy trinity of modern Irish literature," which rings strangely of one who disparaged the Holy Trinity, discounting with considerable scholarly fury in his final novel, "The Dalkey Archive," the very notion of the Holy Ghost, as having been heedlessly foisted upon the Christian Creed by the Council of Alexandria in the year 362. The man was ingenious and learned like Jim Joyce and like Sam Beckett gave the reader a sweet dose of hopelessness but unlike either of these worthies did not arrive at what we might call artistic resolution. His novels begin with a swoop and a song but end in an uncomfortable murk and with an air of impatience.



Some of his books have the twilit shimmer of a Celtic fairy tale.

RICCARDO VECCHIO

The first, "At Swim-Two-Birds" (1939), is the best known and the most rigorously confusing—confusing even the compendium's introducer, Keith Donohue, who describes it as "a mock-heroic novel about a man named Orlick Trellis," when in fact Orlick is the relatively incidental son of *Dermot* Trellis, a bedridden author introduced, on page 31, as "writing a book on sin and the wages attaching thereto." In equipping himself for this mighty task he "has bought a ream of ruled foolscap" and "is compelling all his characters to live with him in the Red Swan Hotel so that he can keep an eye on them." Dermot Trellis is enough captivated by the beauty of Sheila Lamont, a character he has invented to illustrate female virtue, "that he so far forgets himself as to assault her himself." Not only assaults: he impregnates her. Their child is Orlick, who, after an education in the home of the Pooka MacPhellimey—one of several figures from Irish legend that have materialized in the narrative—becomes a writer himself, coached by three idlers called Shanahan, Furriskey, and Antony Lamont, the abused woman's brother, all of them intent upon indicting and punishing, by way of Orlick's fledgling fiction, his father's perfidy. The elder Trellis is kept immobilized in his bed by surreptitiously drug-induced sleep while his characters, including a number of American cowboys recruited from the novels of one William Tracy, run wild. At least, that's what I think is happening. The manuscript keeps re-starting itself, repeating whole paragraphs at a time, and the only segments of Irish life that savor of actual experience are the unnamed narrator's passing conversations with his sententious uncle and with his flippant acquaintances at University College, Dublin. It is this unnamed narrator, easily confused with the young Flann O'Brien, who is composing this many-levelled travesty of a novel. Graham Greene called "At Swim-Two-Birds" "one of the best books of our century. A book in a thousand . . . in the line of *Ulysses* and *Tristram Shandy*." The Chicago *Tribune* said, more cagily, that it is "of such staggering originality that it baffles description and very nearly beggars our sense of delight." All of O'Brien's novels of nearly beggared delight convey what Donohue calls his "disdain for certain, clear meaning and interpretation."

Disdainful though it is, "At Swim-Two-Birds" can be wonderfully written, with an offhand lilt that twists the drab ordinary into a peculiar precision:

> On wet days there would be an unpleasant odour of dampness, an aroma of overcoats dried by body-heat.
>
> Now listen, said Shanahan clearing the way with small coughs.
>
> It was an early-morning street, its quiet distances still small secrets shared by night with day.

Like the overbearing master of the Dublin quotidian, James Joyce, O'Brien is not afraid to bore the reader. Pages go by in alcoholic discussion of the relative merits of various musical instruments ("The fiddle is the man, said Shanahan") and the elusive quality of "kangaroolity." A mock-heroic fustian inflates the prose:

> A learning and an erudition boundless in its universality, an affection phenomenal in its intensity and a quiet sympathy with the innumerable little failings of our common humanity—these were the sterling qualities that made Mr John Furriskey a man among men and endeared him to the world and his wife.

If this tone was inspired by the many mock-heroic passages in "Ulysses," O'Brien's impudent introduction of Finn MacCool, the Pooka MacPhellimey, and the invisible Good Fairy ("I am like a point in Euclid, explained the Good Fairy, position but no magnitude, you know") into the cast of "At Swim-Two-Birds" may allude to the background of archaic myth in "Finnegans Wake," which was also published in 1939 but, starting in 1924, was heralded by advance excerpts, under the title "Work in Progress," in various French and English-language publications, and was surely known to O'Brien. Joyce cast a heavy shadow on the younger writer's mind, being often invoked in O'Brien's newspaper column and emerging as a character in his last novel.

O'Brien's next novel, "The Third Policeman," widely regarded as his best, was rejected, in 1940, by his publisher, Longmans, Green & Co., and consigned to a drawer, where it waited until the year after the author's death, in 1966, for its publication. Read in sequence, as following hard upon "At Swim-Two-Birds," it can be appreciated as equally fantastic and original but more coherent, with a story line that rouses suspense and comes, in irregular fashion, full circle. In its heterodox way, it tells a tale of Hell and of a murderer's proper punishment. "The Complete Novels" includes a diffidently exuberant letter that O'Brien wrote to William Saroyan, another free literary spirit of the time:

> When you get to the end of this book you realize that my hero or main character (he's a heel and a killer) has been dead throughout the book and that all the queer ghastly things which have been happening to him are happening in a sort of hell which he earned for the killing. . . . I think the idea of a man being dead all the time is pretty new. When you are writing about the world of the dead—and the damned—where none of the rules and laws (not even the law of gravity) holds good, there is any amount of scope for back-chat and funny cracks.

His narrator, again nameless, is persuaded, by the deceiving scoundrel John Divney, to commit robbery and murder so gradually ("Three further months passed before I could bring myself to agree to the proposal and three months more before I openly admitted to Divney that my misgivings were at an end"), and so ingenuously accepts the consequent terrors and perils, that he doesn't seem a heel at all; he seems as innocent as Alice in Wonderland or one of Kafka's heroes, gamely trying to puzzle through a bizarre and bewildering world. We identify with him, to a degree rarely permitted by O'Brien, who, even in his rambling, personal daily column, maintained a certain brusque distance from the reader. (Toward the end of "The Dalkey Archive," a character delivers what feels like the author's own credo of authorship: "One must write outside oneself. I'm fed up with writers who put a fictional gloss over their own squabbles and troubles. It's a form of conceit, and usually it's very tedious.")

The protagonist of "The Third Policeman" occupies the stage continuously, without the subplots and compounded fictions of "At Swim-Two-Birds." His voice is confiding, making us privy to his musings as he moves through a rural landscape redolent of a prehistoric past:

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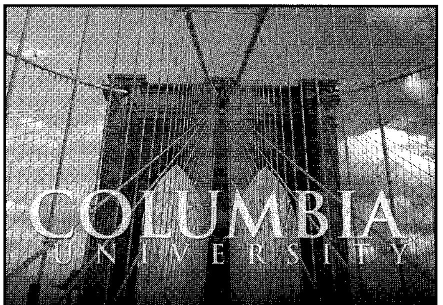

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> The road was narrow, white, old, hard and scarred with shadow. It ran away westwards in the mist of the early morning, running cunningly through the little hills and going to some trouble to visit tiny towns which were not, strictly speaking, on its way. It was possibly one of the oldest roads in the world. I found it hard to think of a time when there was no road there because the trees and the tall hills and the fine views of bogland had been arranged by wise hands for the pleasing picture they made when looked at from the road. Without a road to have them looked at from they would have a somewhat aimless if not a futile aspect.

From this recurrent image of a road he drops into evoking the thought of his intellectual idol, the "physicist, ballistician, philosopher and psychologist" called de Selby. A number of footnotes quoting the de Selby scholars Le Fournier, Hatchjaw, Bassett, Kraus, Le Clerque, and Henderson reveal their subject to have been less a savant than an idiot, who fell asleep in meetings of learned societies and even "when walking in crowded thoroughfares," who could not distinguish men from women, who believed that night comes because of the day's accretions of dirty air, and who left behind a closely handwritten two-thousand-page Codex of which not one word is legible. De Selby is a vivid comic invention, perpetrated by O'Brien with pedantic gusto, and the narrator's loyalty to this preposterous wizard adds to his sympathetic qualities.

Policemen—courteous, overweight, and menacing—and bicycles figure prominently among the figments of "The Third Policeman." Perhaps the most erotic passage in O'Brien's fiction concerns a bicycle that nuzzles up to our hero in a moment of need:

> How can I convey the perfection of my comfort on the bicycle, the completeness of my union with her, the sweet responses she gave me at every particle of her frame? . . . She moved beneath me with agile sympathy in a swift, airy stride, finding smooth ways among the stony tracks, swaying and bending skillfully to match my changing attitudes, even accommodating her left pedal patiently to the awkward working of my wooden leg.

The wooden leg attracts fourteen men with the same affliction; they try to rescue him from the policemen, who have led the narrator through a subterranean realm of circular corridors and metal doors not dissimilar to one of Beckett's carefully mapped Hells. Ovenlike cabinets produce objects that defy description ("I can only say that these objects, not one of which resembled the other, were of no known dimensions"), as well as a half-ton block of gold and a host of other wish fulfillments. Surreal though all this is, the reader cares about what happens next because it promises, unlike events in "At Swim-Two-Birds," to be connected to what went before and what will come. Into this weird fable of guilt and flight O'Brien has inserted some curious truths (bicycles are never mounted from the right) and some ineffable sentences:

> Birds were audible in the secrecy of the bigger trees, changing branches and conversing not tumultuously.

> MacCruiskeen lit a match for our cigarettes and then threw it carelessly on the plate floor where it lay looking very much important and alone.

> The long evening had made its way into the barrack through the windows, creating mysteries everywhere, erasing the seam between one thing and another, lengthening out the floors and either thinning the air or putting some refinement on my ear enabling me to hear for the first time the clicking of a cheap clock from the kitchen.

The rather systematic French absurdism of Jarry and Queneau takes on the twilit shimmer of a Celtic fairy tale. Yet the book, for all its shape-shifting comedy, has a heft of despair to it, an honest nihilism, as expressed by Martin Finnucane, an unrepentant robber. Asked by our narrator if he has any objections to life, he answers, "Is it life? . . . I would rather be without it . . . for there is a queer small utility in it. You cannot eat it or drink it or smoke it in your pipe, it does not keep the rain out and it is a poor armful in the dark. . . . It is a great mistake and a thing better done without, like bed-jars and foreign bacon."

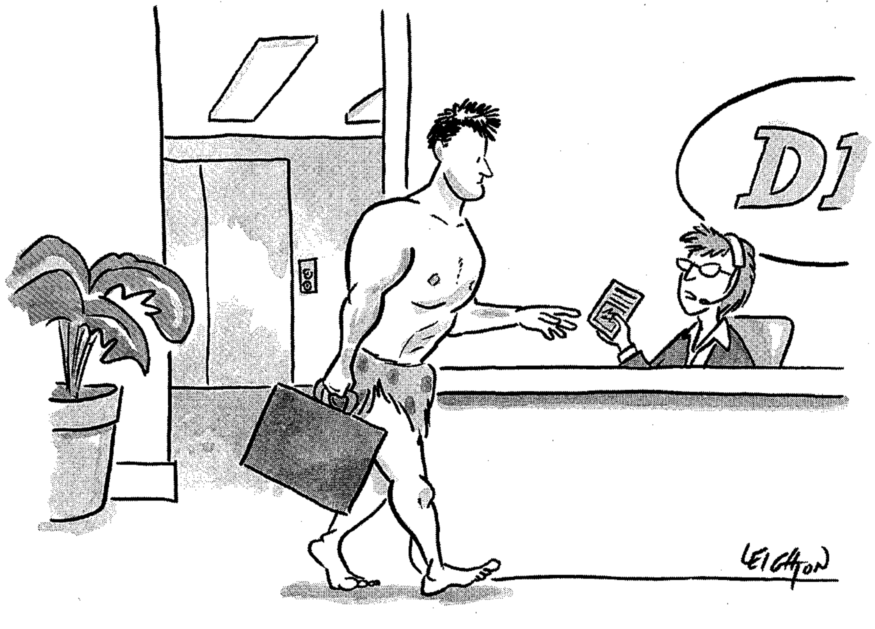
O'Brien, who spoke Irish Gaelic in his childhood home, wrote his next extended fiction, "An Béal Bocht," in Gaelic, in 1941; in 1973, it was translated, by Patrick C. Power, into a spirited imitation of O'Brien's English as "The Poor Mouth: A Bad Story About the Hard Life." Less than a hundred pages long, the tale has the advantage of a relatively clear, if extravagant, story line and a distinct satiric point—i.e., that the Irish

Republic's official cherishing of the nearly extinct Gaelic language ignores the miserable poverty of its surviving speakers, the rain-battered peasantry of the countryside. In one episode, government orators at a Gaelic *feis* parrot and praise the venerable language while in their audience "many Gaels collapsed from hunger and from the strain of listening." In another, a folklorist from Dublin, visiting O'Brien's fictional Gaeltacht area of Corkadoragha, and frustrated by the drunken taciturnity of an assembly of local males, records the muttering of a pig under the impression that it is Gaelic: "He understood that good Gaelic is difficult but that the best Gaelic of all is well-nigh unintelligible." Parodying sentimental novels and memoirs in modern Gaelic by such authors as Tomás Ó Criomhthainn and Séamas Ó Grianna, O'Brien protests on behalf of a depressed Irish population: "In one way or another, life was passing us by and we were suffering misery, sometimes having a potato and at other times having nothing in our mouths but sweet words of Gaelic." His hero, young Bonaparte O'Coonassa, does find, in an abysmal cave inhabited by a hermit, a hoard of gold coins, but the cave also holds a stream of yellow water that, in a scene of alcoholic revelation with counterparts in every novel by this author, turns out to be whiskey:

> Amazement surged up in my head until it injured me. I went to the well on my knees, to the place where the yellow water was bursting up, and consumed enough to set every bone a-tremble.

Had "The Third Policeman" made its way to print in 1940, there is no telling what further novels O'Brien might have written. As it was, he devoted his contrarian instincts and bristling erudition (he knew a startling amount about steam engines, and could toss off sentences in Greek, Latin, French, German, and Italian) to his column in the *Irish Times*, busying himself as well with plays and television scripts. Not until 1961 did he publish another novel, "The Hard Life: An Exegesis of Squalor." He dedicated "this misterpiece" to Graham Greene, "whose own forms of gloom I admire," and chose as his epigraph the *pensée* of Pascal's that blames all the trouble of the world on people ever leaving their rooms. Donohue's introduction relates the novel's Dublin milieu and its relatively conservative artistry to the author's twenty-year stint of churning out newspaper copy as Myles na gCopaleen. He likens its humdrum setting and mood to Joyce's "Dubliners," and errs by claiming that the action ends in 1904, the year of Bloomsday—its climactic death comes in 1910. "Oddly oblique," he concludes, "*The Hard Life* reads as . . . a rather mild attack on the pretenses of Catholicism and an already vanishing social order."

Oblique, indeed: there is nothing especially hard or squalid about the situ-



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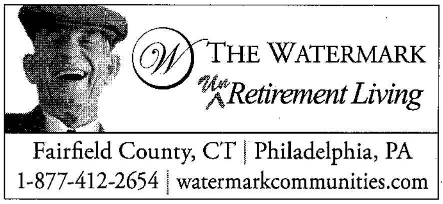
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ation of the two orphaned brothers, Manus and Finbarr, who grow up under the care of their deceased mother's half brother Mr. Collopy and his daughter, Miss Annie. The boys are fed, sheltered, clothed, and sent to school. Mr. Collopy has for a friend an immigrant German Jesuit, Father Kurt Fahrt, and for a cause he leads a campaign to provide adequate public rest rooms for the good women of Dublin. In their evening conversations, he baits Father Fahrt about the Jesuits, but the priest makes peaceable replies and—a traditional Irish courtesy—accepts another drink. Possibly infuriated by his characters' refusal to give the novel momentum, O'Brien consigns them all to a flagrantly far-fetched encounter in Rome with the Pope, arranged by Manus, who has left Ireland to pursue, with some success, a host of elaborate and fraudulent schemes. The dialogue with the Pope, who speaks a scrupulously transcribed mixture of Latin and Italian, and the unwieldy decline of Mr. Collopy, who becomes prodigiously, fatally heavy through faithful ingestion of Gravid Water as prescribed and supplied by his former ward, do raise smiles and even laughter in the indulgent reader; yet the theme of being poisoned, proposed by an author whose health was sinking, in early middle age, into a morass of uremia, pleurisy, sycosis, neuralgia, anemia, and liver cancer, is not that funny. Like "The Poor Mouth," "The Hard Life" drips with disgust, but it feels too autobiographical to direct the disgust outward onto objective correlatives. It ends when Finbarr, the relatively inert and passive narrator, abruptly purges himself of his contents:

> In a daze I lifted my own glass and without knowing what I was doing did exactly what the brother did, drained the glass in one vast swallow. Then I walked quickly but did not run to the lavatory. There, everything inside me came up in a tidal surge of vomit.

"The Dalkey Archive," published in 1964, has lent its name to the avant-garde publishing house that keeps Flann O'Brien in print in this country. It is the only one of his novels (but for the unfinished "Slattery's Sago Saga") to be written in the third person. The opening pages, evoking the village of Dalkey, are promising ("It is an unlikely town, huddled, quiet, pretending to be asleep. Its streets are narrow, not quite self-evident as streets and with meetings which seem accidental. Small shops look closed but are open"), and, toward the end, a penetrating poignance colors the portrait of an imagined James Joyce who quietly tends bar south of Dublin and attends Mass daily, who did not die in Switzerland but lived on, disowning "Ulysses" as a "dirty book" and forgetting "Finnegans Wake" entirely. He has shed his voracious genius and emerged as a decent, mild old man with bad eyesight who timidly dreams of becoming a Jesuit. O'Brien had Oedipal feelings about Joyce, and this conjuration momentarily steals the show. The adventures of Mick Shaughnessy, a civil servant with a girlfriend called Mary and a self-assigned mission to save the world from a four-gallon metal cask of oxygen-eating chemicals, fail to engage both the writer and the reader. De Selby has been salvaged from the unpublished manuscript of "The Third Policeman" but is presented with nothing like the brio of that book's footnotes. The rejected novel's bicycle-mad policemen, and its "fine views of bogland," are transplanted nearly intact. Even its road magic is remembered:

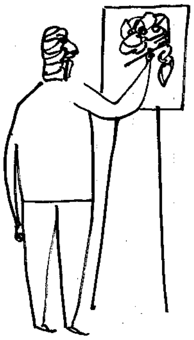
> The cracking of your feet on the road makes a certain amount of road come up into you. When a man dies they say he returns to clay funereally but too much walking fills you up with clay far sooner (or buries bits of you along the road) and brings your death halfway to meet you.

However, as is said of one loquacious character, "his fancies were usually amusing but not so good when they were meaningless." Whatever meaning O'Brien set out with on this particular road has been left scattered along the wayside. He said of "The Dalkey Archive" that it was "not a novel" but "really an essay in extreme derision of literary attitudes and people, and one pervasive fault is absence of emphasis, in certain places, to help the reader." It was too late for O'Brien to think of helping the reader, though he provides passages of synopsis to keep the events, and non-events, straight. But orthodox narration was never his forte; at his best, he went where he would, at a blithe speed, and carried the reader—a dazzle of verbal dust in his eyes—along. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

A Golden Age, *by Tahmima Anam (Harper; $24.95).* In this striking début novel, set in the nineteen-seventies, a young widow and her children become caught up in Bangladesh's war for independence. Rehana exists on the edge of things: a native of Calcutta, she was resettled in Dhaka by her husband and speaks Urdu, the language of West Pakistan, as fluently as Bengali, the language of restive East Pakistan—soon to be Bangladesh. Her children, though, are fervent patriots, joining in student marches and making speeches; as rhetoric becomes revolution, her son joins a guerrilla group and her daughter decamps to Calcutta to write tracts exposing the atrocities committed by the Pakistani Army. Anam deftly weaves the personal and the political, giving the terrors of war spare, powerful treatment while lyrically depicting the way in which the struggle for freedom allows Rehana to discover both her strength and her heart.

People of the Book, *by Geraldine Brooks (Viking; $25.95).* When an Australian rare-book conservator named Hanna Heath finds a butterfly wing, a salt crystal, a white hair, and bloodstains in the recently rediscovered Sarajevo Haggadah, a late-medieval illuminated codex of uncertain provenance, she sets out to solve the mystery of the book's origins. To her disappointment, analysis of the specimens reveals little. "It's too bad," an organic chemist tells her. "Blood is potentially so dramatic." Brooks, beginning where science leaves off, uses Hanna's finds as entry points to richly imagined historical landscapes peopled by the Haggadah's creators, protectors, and would-be destroyers—a female Muslim slave in Convivencia Spain, a Jewish doctor in fin-de-siècle Vienna, an alcoholic priest in seventeenth-century Venice. Their narratives alternate with Hanna's own, and the final, multilayered effect is complex and moving.



The Cure Within, *by Anne Harrington (Norton; $25.95).* Harrington's history of "mind-body medicine" brings clarity and nuance to a thorny topic. She approaches it in terms of "narrative templates," maintaining that the way we think about the placebo effect echoes the miraculous nineteenth-century healings at Lourdes, and what we now call "the power of suggestion" has roots running through hypnotism and mesmerism back to the early Catholic practice of exorcism. Harrington elegantly ties together the popular appeal of mind-body explanations with their formal development in scientific communities. The journalist Norman Cousins, who successfully fought a degenerative tissue disorder with a regimen of Marx Brothers movies, "Candid Camera," and Vitamin C, became, in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, an icon of "the power of positive thinking" to cure disease, and, ultimately, a central player in the establishment of psychoneuroimmunology as a medical discipline.

Lucia, *by Andrea di Robilant (Knopf; $24.95).* Drawing on the letters of his great-great-great-great-grandmother Lucia Mocenigo, a Venetian aristocrat, di Robilant paints a vivacious picture of the Napoleonic age. The fifteen-year-old Lucia's correspondence with her new fiancé, the nobleman Alvise Mocenigo, includes a glissando from formality to rapture that gives an idea of the narrative's pitch: "My most esteemed spouse, my good father having informed me of your favourable disposition towards me, and having told me of your worthy qualities . . . I felt such agitation in my heart that for a brief moment I even lost consciousness." Over the years, as Lucia travelled throughout Europe, this girlish enthusiasm was whittled away by a selfish, neglectful, and manipulative husband; on discovering, after Alvise's death, letters from an impressive array of lovers, she filed them alphabetically by author. Back in Venice, living in an apartment where, she complained, rats were her only reliable company, Lucia became Byron's landlady.

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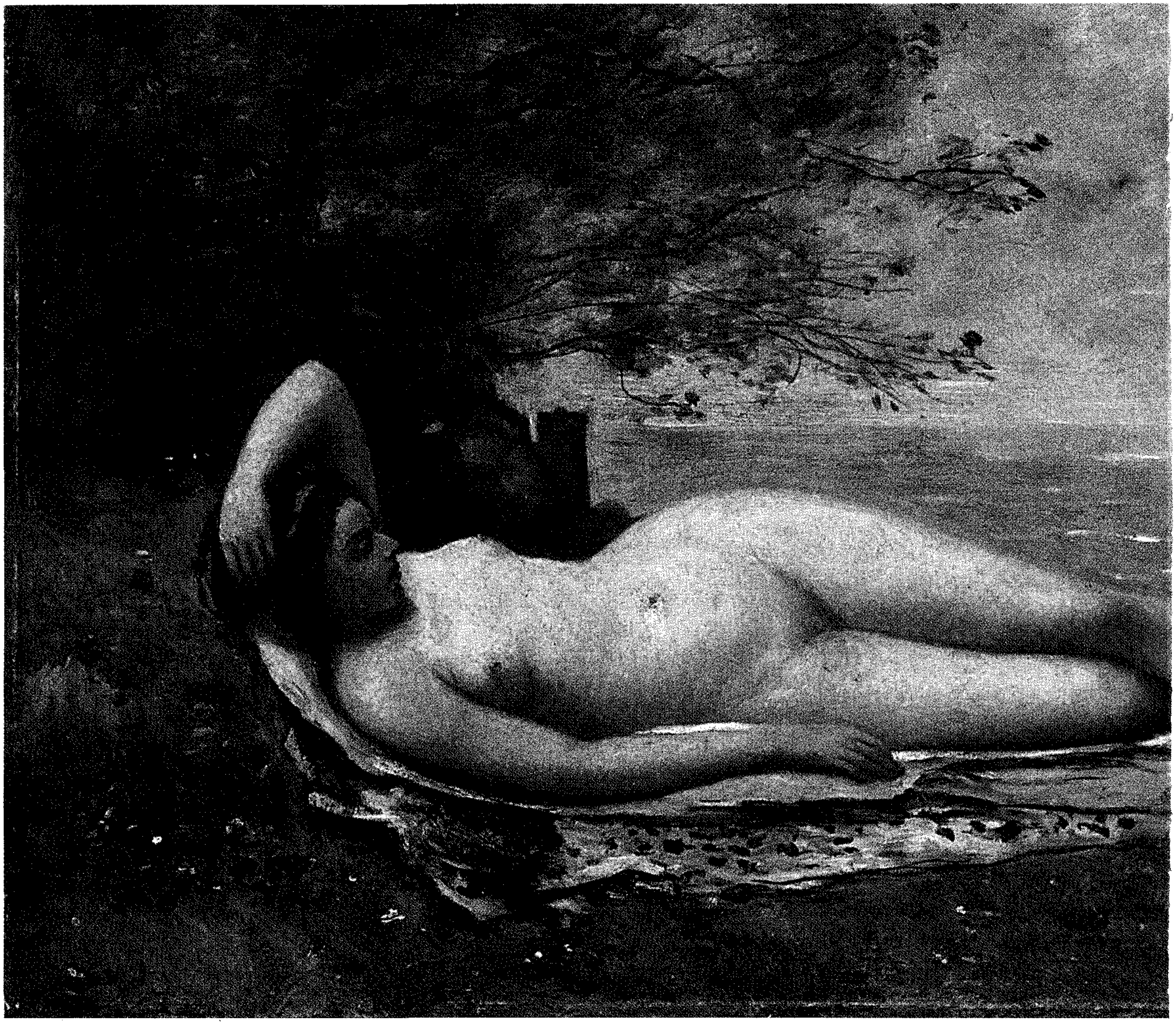
THE ART WORLD

EUROPEAN TOUR

New galleries demonstrate Philippe de Montebello's method.

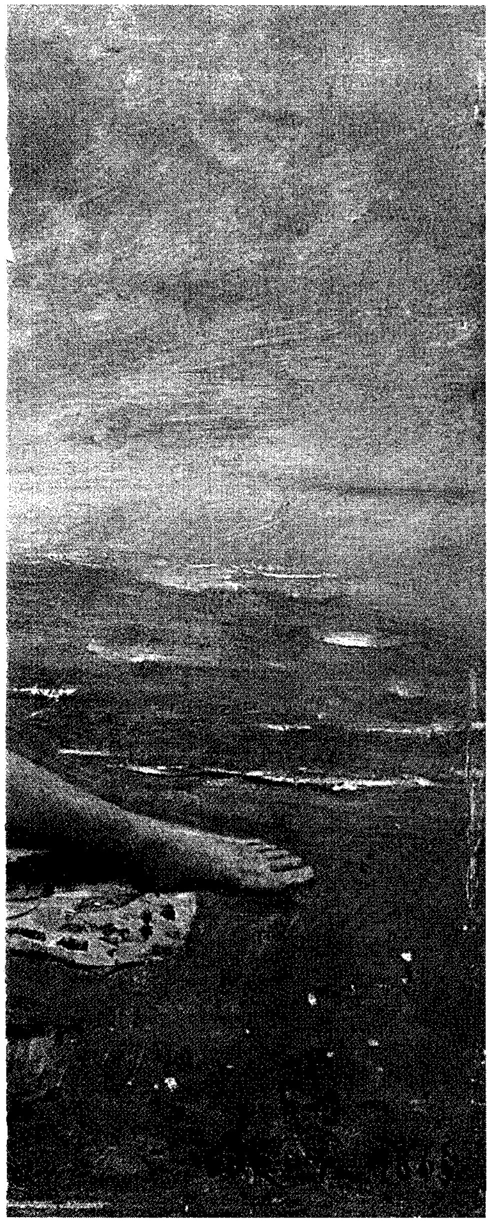
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"If this were four years ago, we would be standing in thin air," Gary Tinterow said in one of the Metropolitan Museum's ten new galleries—making a total of thirty-one, spanning nearly forty thousand square feet—for nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century art, of which Tinterow is the curator in charge. Some of the space was a brainstorm of Philippe de Montebello, who is soon to retire as the Met's director after a glorious thirty-one-year reign. (How badly he will be missed we must wait to know.) As Tinterow told it, "Philippe looked up in the Oceanic collection"—a colossal first-floor space, which reopened last year and is still plenty lofty—"and thought, I can create more galleries." The extra galleries were needed for an abundance of new acquisitions, as well as for many treasures that have languished in storage, and were called forth by a chronic de Montebelloan itch, which is also apparent in the recently refashioned quarters for Greek and Roman art, French decorative arts, and Native North American art: make what's good better. The result displays the director's touch to a degree that is common among feats of his regime—which is not at all. It is the work of strong-minded curators, led by Tinterow and Rebecca Rabinow, an associate curator, who have been given liberty and firm support to manifest their tastes and ideas. These are both crowd-pleasingly theatrical, as in the prominent hanging of a splashy item like John Singer Sargent's "Madame X,"



COURTESY METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Camille Corot's "Bacchante by the Sea" (1865). A new room promotes him as a one-man Brain Trust for the rethinking of landscape an and deep-dish scholarly, in, for example, three galleries packed with oil sketches, many by barely known hands, from the early nineteenth century. Labels perch casually on wainscoting shelves in rooms of laconic Beaux-Arts design until the late arrival of a more modern look, with the wainscoting dropping to baseboards. Walls are painted warm, perfect colors: oxblood for the Romantics, eggplantish for the Post-Impressionists. The installation runs on pleasures of absorption, aiming less to educate than to serve self-education. ("They expect everybody to become a connoisseur!" a friend marvelled as we toured the premises.) These are old-fashioned virtues, which, like most of the de Montebello Met's more than thirty special exhibitions a year, scintillate.



iguration in the aftermath of Romanticism.

Museology is in moral crisis after a spate of manic construction that has exalted edifices over their contents, and institutional narcissism over the romance of art lovers and art works. Witness the revamped Museum of Modern Art: it is less a building than a life-size architectural maquette, in which you and I fill the roles of little figures stuck in to convey scale. Our enjoyment of the museum's unequalled collections feels incidental to another, mysterious purpose, perhaps known only by some executive cabal. I think that unease with the Modern helps to explain the euphoria, of everyone I know in the art world, that has come to attend any visit to the Met—a place that is not only for us but about us, as parishioners of visual high culture. Like ever fewer museum directors today, de Montebello cut his professional teeth as a curator, specializing in European paintings. The open secret of his success is a deep feel for the seriousness, and an identification with the enthusiasm, of his curatorial team. He trusts and abets their yearnings to connect. The payoff is a museum that honors the variety and the alacrity of our interests and appetites, and by "our" I mean that of all who vote with their feet to be present. (Met crowds, though inconveniencing, impart a sweetness of democratic participation like that of the first half hour or so of showing up for jury duty.) With gladness, I note a tincture of that quality in the compact, vernacular spaces and the curatorial tact of an inaugural show of assembled sculpture and collage at the relocated New Museum of Contemporary Art. The New Museum also palpably credits viewers with a will and a right to uncoerced experience. So it can be done, with or without marble pilasters. The tipoff is that you don't find yourself wondering why anything is designed or presented in the way that it is. To look is to get it.

For those of us who have looked a great deal at the Met's nineteenth-century exhibits, their reshuffling and enhancement, with some two hundred more works than before, are a tonic shock. The revision pushes a re-start button in our understanding of modernity's genesis, bringing settled estimations of artists and movements up for review. I foresee consequential effects on young artists and scholars, who have been given what almost amounts to a new past. The novelties may not be radical; they involve no

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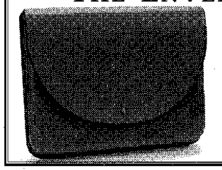

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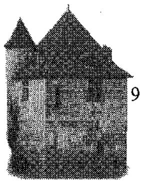

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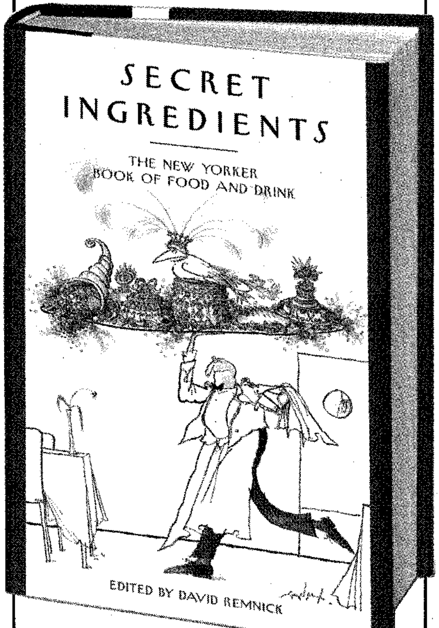

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shakeup in historical categories, beyond a powerful representation of early Picasso, Matisse, Derain, and other flat-out moderns. (This highlights an abrupt transition, to put it mildly, in a time line that begins with students of David.) And not much could be done to correct the biases of the collectors and the patrons, mostly bygone, who have supplied the collection—chiefly, a compulsive skew to the French and a wariness of the spicy, apparent in a weak account of Symbolism and related tastes. (The curators counter that lacuna with their one reconstituted interior: the incredible Art Nouveau "Wisteria Dining Room," of 1910-14, a Parisian fantasia whose panelling, murals, rug, and furniture run a contagious fever of neurotic aestheticism.) Genteel proclivities persist in overemphases of Pissarro, Degas ballet dancers, Renoir, Bonnard, and society portraiture. But even those soft spots register freshly, demanding retooled thought from anyone who would disparage them—in the company of masses of citizens whom they still and will always genuinely thrill. Meanwhile, paramount figures are pressured to reassert their authority. Ingres, Manet, Cézanne, and van Gogh do so. Degas's scads of paintings, pastels, and sculptures, albeit marvellous, feel a mite diminished—dawdling in relative intensity. Up surprising notches from their wonted heights, for me, are Corot, Courbet, and, of all perennial beauty-contest winners, Monet.

The curators have given us a room of Corot paintings which promotes the Barbizon master as a one-man Brain Trust for the rethinking of landscape and figuration in the aftermath of Romanticism. Picasso, in his neoclassical phase, adapted Corot's investment of figures with sculptural weight. No one, to this day, has matched his silvery landscapes that conjoin dreaminess and the scratchy specificities of raw nature. The lovely, small "Bacchante by the Sea" (1865) is like a Rosetta Stone of painting, in which a studio nude and a landscape differently translate a singular, poetic imperative. The rooms of oil sketches, which will reward hours of honed discrimination, provide a nicely lulling setup for the thunderclap début of Courbet, whose titanic ambition and downright rudeness announce a rough-and-tumble new world that feels contemporary again in ways that will engage us when a Courbet retrospective, now in Paris, opens at the Met on February 27th. Was he drunk when he painted "After the Hunt" (ca. 1859)? The crazy miens of a hunter and his dogs, gloating over dead game, suggest it, as does the work's blowsy but enthralling lyricism, like that of a pub tenor after midnight. Observe, in the new hanging, how the later, similarly aggressive—though dashingly urbane—majesty of Manet seems to draft, like a race car, in Courbet's slipstream. As for Monet, the concentrated array of his paintings, in context, revivifies his genius, on a level of purely visual intelligence—and of breathtaking indifference to anything else—where he stands alone in the universe. Beholding one of the "Rouen Cathedral"s the other day reawakened a feeling about Monet that I hadn't had in many years: fright, at the apparition of a god of unfathomable pleasure.

And now for something awful: an instructive gallery, entitled "European Visions of North Africa," of Orientalist paintings by academicians, most skillfully and egregiously Jean-Léon Gérôme. (But make an exception for the sneaking beauties of Charles Bargue's "A Bashi-Bazouk.") Brilliantly, this embarrassing legacy of imperialist condescension will serve as an anteroom to the authenticities of the Met's Islamic collections, which are set to reopen in 2011. These and other Salon products newly on view—including three paintings by the underrated Franz Xaver Winterhalter, a society portraitist whose mannerly archaism feels arrestingly honest—serve an immersion in actual as opposed to tendentiously edited history.

Might the self-evident goodness of the Met's curatorial style key a trend in museums? I suspect that our current, practically hysterical adulation of de Montebello evinces a fear that, like Prospero, he will drown the magic as he departs. But it may equally announce a Zeitgeist. Perhaps we've had enough, at last, of preening and second-guessing, agenda-ridden, sweaty-palmed institutional imbroglios. De Montebello's obvious formula should not elude the grasp of lesser mortals: get top people who love what they do, then have them do it. Make everything else secondary. ♦

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Art from the Met's new galleries.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

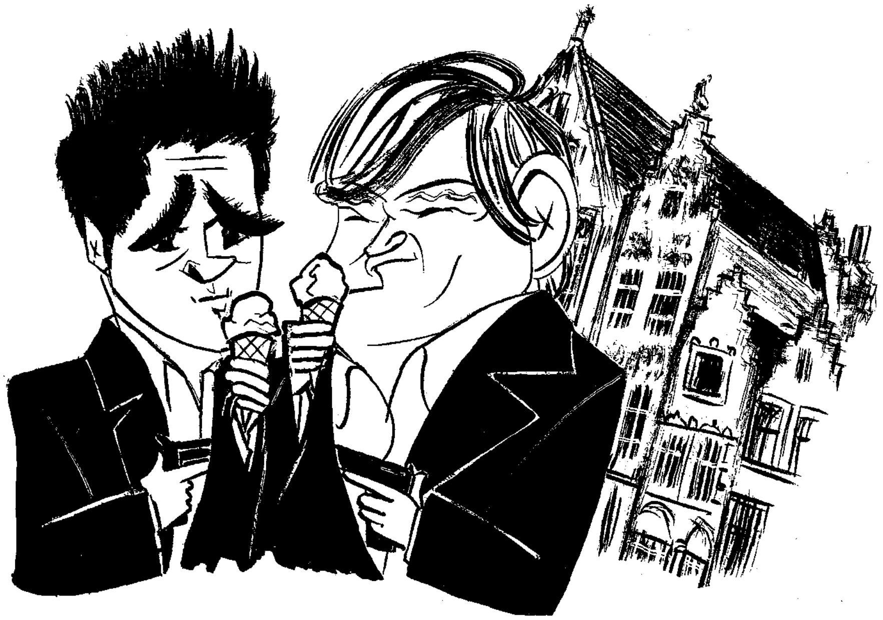
STRANGERS

"In Bruges" and "The Band's Visit."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Where would movies be without expatriation? Nothing tests a hero like transplanting him to foreign soil, and there is no guarantee that he will become any more heroic when ripped from the reassurance of home turf. Two new movies, "In Bruges" and "The Band's Visit," so perplex their deracinated characters that what we end up with feels less like a narrative and more like a foundation course in floundering.

"In Bruges" is not the most secretive of titles. Two Irish hit men, Ken (Brendan Gleeson) and Ray (Colin Farrell), fresh from a kill, are packed off to Belgium and told to lie low, while awaiting further instructions. They loiter through flawless streets and cruise along the canals, taking in what Ken calls "the best-preserved medieval city anywhere in Europe" and what Ray, whose aesthetics are not quite so demanding as his liver or his loins, describes as "a shithole." As for historical significance, well, history is merely "a load of stuff that's already happened," as Ray points out, and thus of no further interest. You soon see what the writer and director, Martin McDonagh, has in mind: take a famously pretty place, lapped by the past, and shove it into the present day by spilling blood and brains on its cobbles and polluting its misty air with poisoned oaths. The movie is giving the finger to anyone with a taste for heritage cinema—anyone who hopes that a movie, like life, or like a week in Bruges, can be a box of chocolates.



Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleeson in a movie directed by Martin McDonagh.

TOM BACHTELL

I get the point, but I must admit to feeling more bullied than convinced. No one wants a movie that tiptoes in step with political correctness, yet the willful opposite can be equally noxious, and, as "In Bruges" barges and blusters its way through dwarf jokes, child-abuse jokes, jokes about fat black women, and moldy old jokes about Americans, it runs the risk of pleasing itself more than its paying viewers. McDonagh is a garlanded playwright, famed for "The Pillowman" and "The Beauty Queen of Leenane," and it comes as no surprise that this film (his first feature, after an Oscar-winning short entitled "Six Shooter") should be menaced by its creator's gifts. If your verbal facility streams along like Mc-

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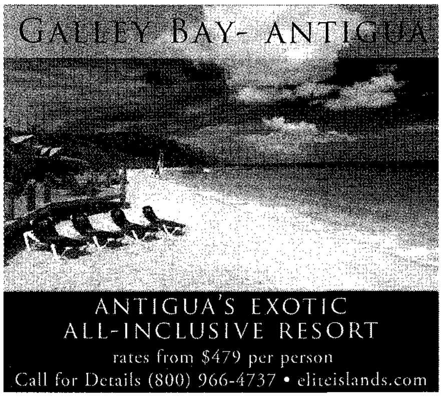

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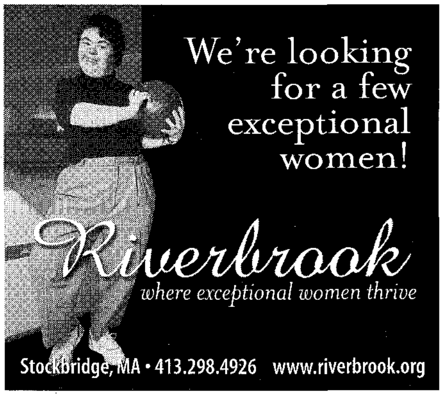

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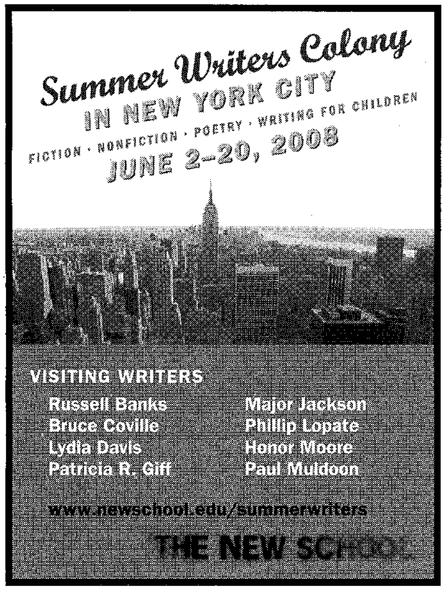
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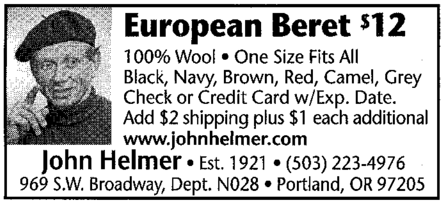
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Donagh's, it must be almost impossible to check the rush, and the result is a number of scenes that overspill their boundaries; he should have hired the fiercest editor in the business. Mind you, the movie's weakness for outrage strays far beyond the verbal: once a director has decided to show bullet holes blasted through children's foreheads as well as adult ones, and the lower half of a leg lying like meat on a street, I guess no one is going to stop him.

The best joke of this movie, though, is that it functions most happily at its most placid. Some of the early sequences, where McDonagh's dialogue is suffused with his debt to Beckett, are warmed by an idle suspense:

> "We've got to stay here for two weeks, until he rings."
> "What if he doesn't ring?"

Every now and then, the chatter is put on hold, and we are free to inspect the men who speak it; the one thing worth remembering in this playwright's project is not the muck of its wordplay but the attention that it pays to Brendan Gleeson's face. Farrell struck me as unfocussed and adrift, as he has so frequently in recent times, resorting too readily to twitches and tears. But Gleeson, who looks half like a whiskey priest and half like a pastry chef's mistake, holds our gaze without effort, not least when his own gaze is held by altarpieces, books, and pictures in Belgian galleries. At one point, the two men stop before a Hieronymus Bosch, his "Last Judgment," marvelling at its torments: tiny figures being drowned and spiked and winkled out of shells with a knife.

All of which makes it a short step to the carnage of the climax. As foreseen, the assassins' employer, Harry (Ralph Fiennes), hitherto just a voice on the phone, finally joins them in person, bearing a gun and a plan. Bodies start to fall and split apart and lose their heads, and you could argue that McDonagh is staking his claim to the infernal Boschean tradition; he even prepares the way by having Ray and Ken mull over the quandaries of guilt and damnation that they learned at school. Nice try, but I don't buy it. Bosch and his contemporaries believed in the existence of the damned, and those painted, freakish sufferers were vessels of genuine dread, whereas "In Bruges" calls its characters to their final reckoning with no higher motive than to blow them merrily away. Why else should Harry come with a fistful of dumdum bullets? When a beautiful, pregnant woman tells him and Ken to lay down their guns, Harry replies, "Don't be stupid. This is a shootout." It's a gag, but also a giveaway: these people have no souls to lose, because they know they're in a movie.

The protagonists of "The Band's Visit" are no less bewildered than those of "In Bruges" to find themselves far from home, but there the resemblance ends. Instead of the baseless insults that Ray fires off against Belgium, we find a diplomatic decorum that verges on the painful; instead of professional assassins, grimly screwing silencers to their muzzles, we get "My Funny Valentine," crooned on a harmless trumpet.

Although this is an Israeli production, written and directed by Eran Kolirin, its main concern is an Egyptian police band, which has been invited to perform in Israel. One glimpse tells us that it is heading, if not for trouble, at least for that area of blunder, becalming, and disappointment where half the world—the half so easily ignored by movies—tends to reside, and which the other half calls failure. The musicians are clad throughout in uniforms of a surprising powder blue, which suggests not the strict maintenance of law and order (you can just about picture this gaggle directing traffic) but a baby's romper suit washed one too many times. They are led by Lieutenant Colonel Tewfiq Zacharya (Sasson Gabai), whose appearance—meek, mustached, and doleful—belies the splendor of his name. He is accompanied by seven players, most of them middle-aged; youth is represented by Khaled (Saleh Bakri), a forthright but ungainly flirt. He goes for smoldering ("Do you like Chet Baker?"), misses by a mile, yet somehow hits his mark.

Thanks to a mixup over names, the band, having landed in Israel, boards the wrong bus and winds up in a place called Bet Hatikva. It rises out of the desert, but you could never mistake it for an oasis. There is no lushness here, no life-giving spring: "no Arab culture, no Israeli culture, no culture at all." That is the caustic view of Dina (Ronit Elkabetz), to whom any interruption—any hint of other lives, however hapless—is a welcome break. Dina runs the town café (get ready for the proud, inquiring look she delivers from its threshold, when the Egyptians first approach), and she pretty much runs the movie, too, dictating not just the passions of the men, with one of whom she deigns to share her bed, but also what you might call the flow of the film's intelligence—cool, unshowy, but decisive. She cuts into a watermelon as if she were demonstrating the murder of Julius Caesar. All in all, Dina is the punchiest female role that you will stumble on this year, and it's a perfect fit for Ronit Elkabetz, whom some viewers will remember from "Late Marriage" (2001): she slips into the part without fuss, as she does into the red flowered dress that she sports for an evening out with the Colonel. "How do I look?" she asks. "Very fine indeed," he replies.

Beached in Bet Hatikva, the Colonel and his band—exquisitely polite to a man, and thus embarrassable to a fault—have found sanctuary with local families for a night. Some fare better than others: one awkward, throat-clearing dinner is saved only when hosts and guests conjoin for a communal rendition of "Summertime," while Khaled assumes the unlikely task of Pandarus, shepherding a young Israeli named Papi (Shlomi Avraham), huge of hair but shrunken of ego, through the agon of courtship at a roller-dancing rink. This is lovingly choreographed—Arab man sits next to Jewish man, on whose knee he softly puts his hand, and Jewish man, thus instructed, puts *his* hand onto knee of Jewish woman on his other side—and, as a result, we are so intent on the comic nicety that we hardly notice the mild breath of symbolism that floats across the film. As language stutters, so the lingua franca of mime and friendly gesture takes its place. I caught a whiff of Tati here, and of the unflustered Aki Kaurismäki, although the closest contender would be the Scottish director Bill Forsyth, whose "Gregory's Girl" and "Local Hero," every bit as localized as "The Band's Visit," seem ever sharper in their power to charm. Kolirin, like Forsyth, is far more observer than dreamer, and what he has conjured up is not some cloying, heal-the-world paean to political harmony but a meditation, as slight and sinewy as the Colonel himself, on the tough art of rubbing along. "Say something in Arabic," Dina commands her new acquaintance, adding, "Just to hear the music." As the film concludes with his upraised hand, conductor's fingers unfurling against a blue sky, you do feel that you have witnessed a small victory of wisdom over indifference and ennui. When in doubt, strike up the band. ♦

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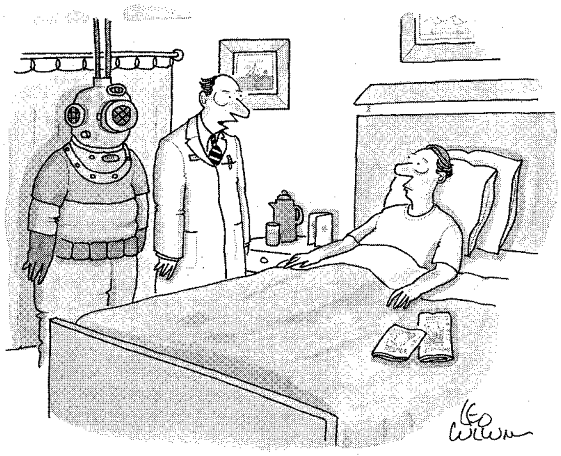
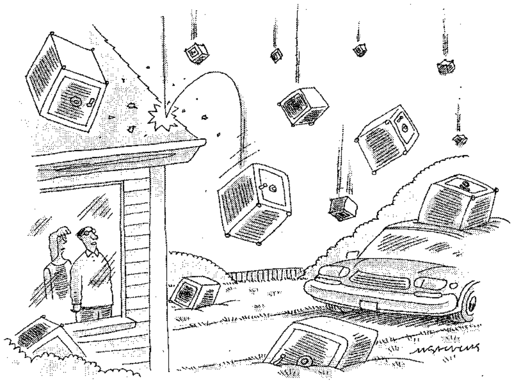
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Danny Shanahan, must be received by Sunday, February 17th. Finalists in the January 28th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 3rd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"I wanted you to meet our colon specialist before we miniaturized him."
Thomas Fox, Houston, Texas



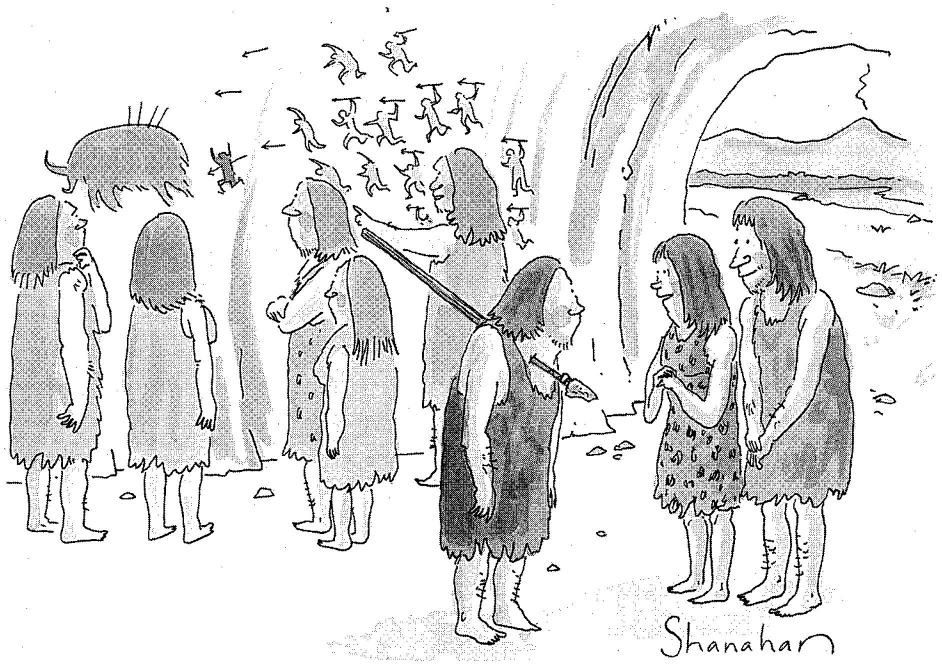
THE FINALISTS

"And tomorrow there's a twenty-per-cent chance of anvils."
Richard Jones, Pasadena, Calif.

"Great. Safes everywhere, and I'm on probation."
Blythe Million, Santa Monica, Calif.

"Every time I wash the car."
Jessie Birks, New York City

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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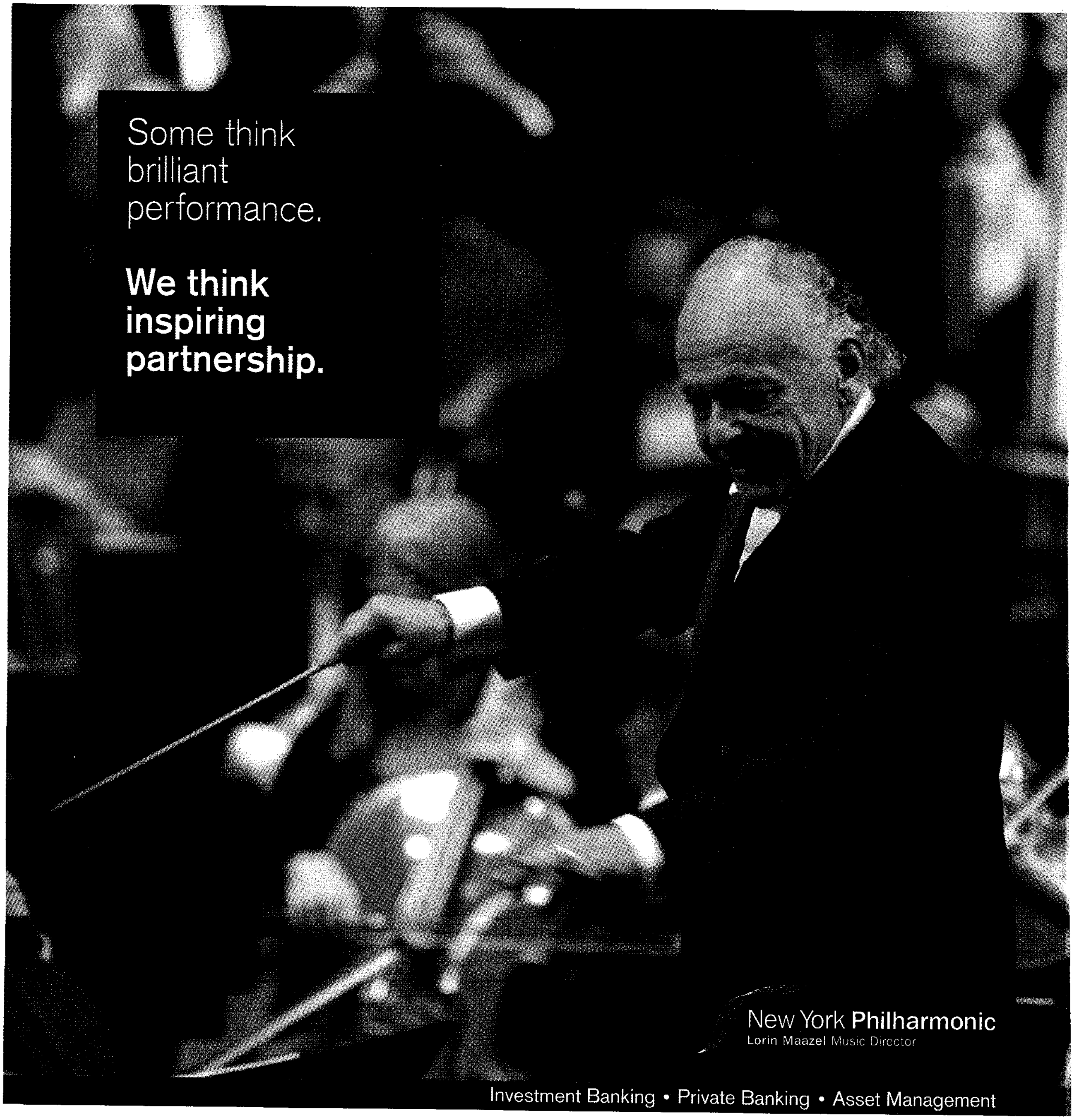
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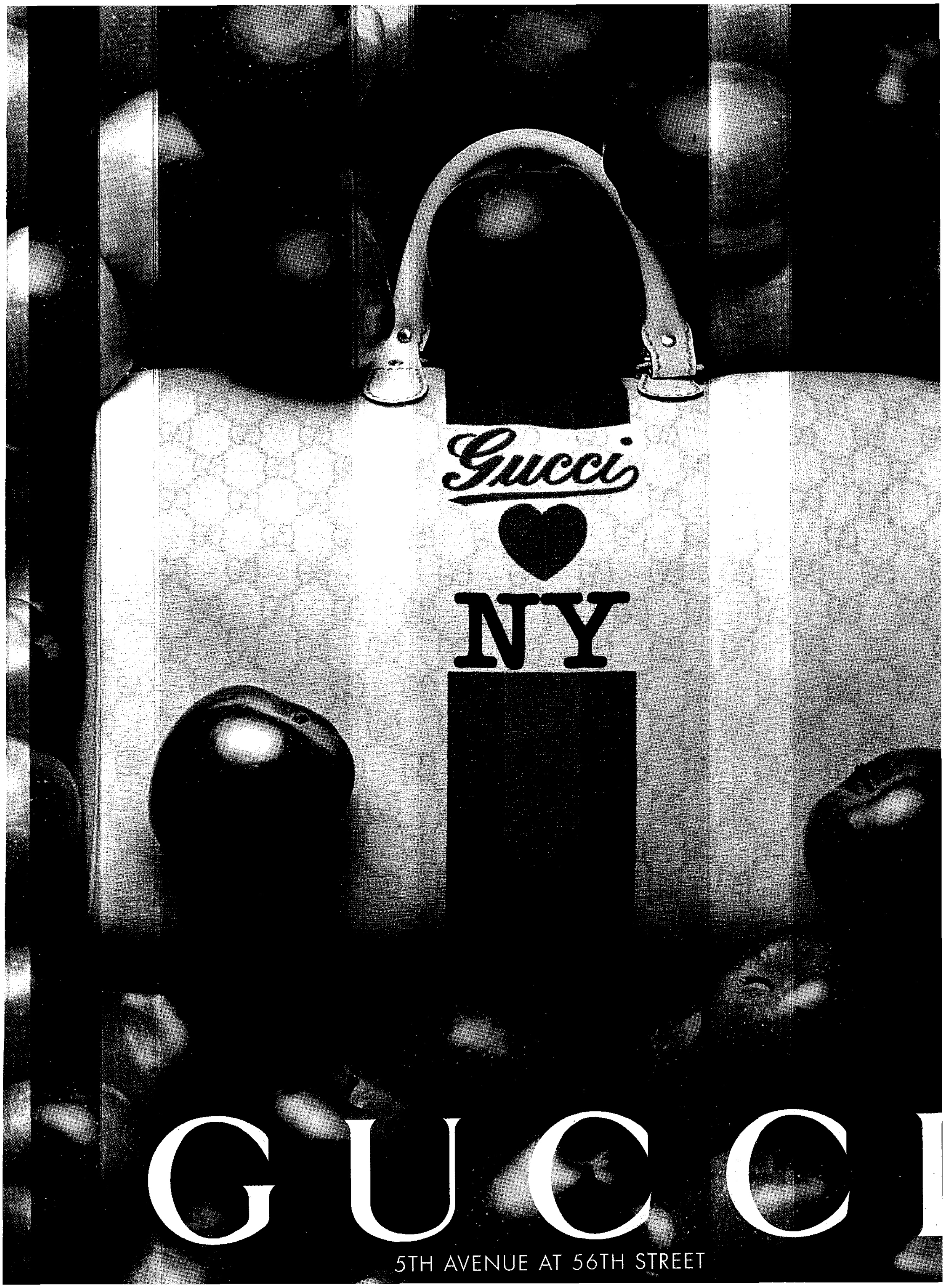
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